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The Truth About Vignolles

Albert Kinross

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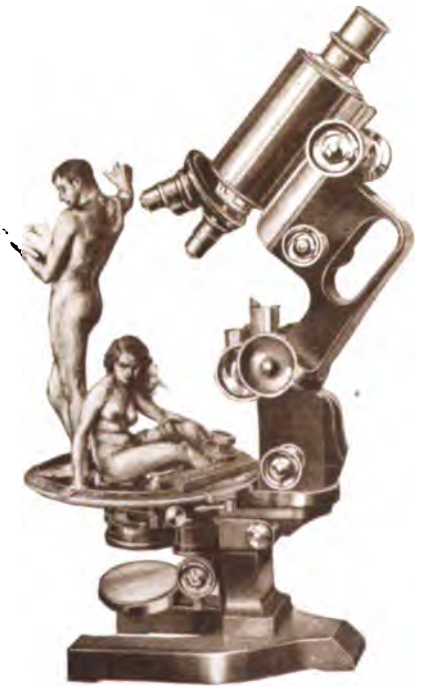

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"She was risking her life to be with me. Can any woman do more?"

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THE TRUTH ABOUT VIGNOLLES

BY

ALBERT KINROSS

ILLUSTRATED BY

ERNEST FUHR

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1922

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DEDICATION

Dear I——

When I came out of the army after five happy years, you were about the only person on this side who seemed to remember that I had ever written or who cared whether I resumed that art. You really seemed to care, and as to so many of the rest, in one way or another, they were out for spoil. Whether it was a question of a roof over my head, clothing to replace my worn uniforms, or so small a matter as my artistic integrity, the general attitude seemed to be, "What can we make out of this blighter now that he has left the army?" During the war nothing was too good for us; when it was over, nothing was too bad. You were the exception that proved the rule, the one bright spot, the point of light in the Rembrandt. Bless you!

I speak of this side of the Atlantic. Across that ocean I was not entirely forgotten. I was even allowed to remember that there had been a war, and that for five variegated years I had been permitted to follow its fortunes. So it has come about that Vignolles has found a place in the American magazines, that most of my cred-

itors are paid, and that I am still alive instead of in the dust-bin. But more even than to my American friends, this book belongs to you. It is not much of a return for so much kindness, for so much faith in me. But, such as it is, I know that you will accept it and point the way to something better. A score of unforgotten, unforgettable faces lurk behind its pages. Neither Philip Howell, nor Royle, nor Gerard Chowne are dead as I sit back and think of them again. The story about Saloniki will always bring back these, and Marlow who cursed me into "auction," and the incredible office of "The Balkan News." And rides into the hills above Doiran, and the sinister plain and God-forsaken lakes that held us captive. Or at Kantara I ride again with "Paddy" Myers, leading our camels out to water; or with Chandler hold my nose before Jerusalem and breathe the cleaner air of Bethlehem and all its hills. One could ramble on and find no end; and, nearer home, it may seem to you, as it has several times occurred to me, that I have to thank the author of a certain spirited autobiography for "Eve Damer," and two especially "decent" children for "The Profiteer." But to you more than to any of these this book belongs, and perhaps you 'll get some fun out of it as well.

EDENBRIDGE. A. K.

16—9—21

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THE TRUTH
ABOUT VIGNOLLES

THE TRUTH ABOUT VIGNOLLES

THE TRUTH ABOUT VIGNOLLES

IS there any better place than London on a fine May morning, and is there any better spot in it than a tuppenny seat looking out on the Row? If there is, I have yet to find it. You sit at your ease and watch the world go by; and sometimes—almost always—there arrives a friend that you have lost, the ending of a story, or the beginnings of a new one. It is Vignolles who has set me going and who has brought about these cursory reflections. Without that seat, without the Row and London on a fine May morning, I should never have known what had become of the old fellow after that last day we spent together.

At the depot, and subsequently, I had come to look on him as one of the lost ones, as one of

the many who have vanished. They are so many that one more or less makes little mark. But there were circumstances about his disappearance not altogether creditable; in fact, Vignolles went to Port Said next morning—he had begged a whole day's leave—and after that we had no trace of him. Some said he was a deserter, just an ordinary deserter, and that, perhaps, he had got aboard a neutral ship, a Dutchman, for instance, or a Swede, and cleared out of it. The Camel Transport Corps is n't exactly an alluring proposition. But there were others, and, indeed, the most of us—for the old chap had n't an enemy—who were pretty certain that Vignolles had reached Port Said all right and then come some sort of a cropper in Arab Town, the festive quarter. After these months in the desert, it seemed more than likely. Knocked on the head, or knifed, or even poisoned; the drink they sell has little relation to the label. He may have turned quarrelsome after a dose of it, and, in one way and another, he had a good deal of money on him. But here was the man himself, bronzed, lean, and gray as ever; rather more gray, for he had dyed his hair to get into the war. A man who does that is n't

likely to funk it, to run away or stow away aboard a neutral boat and clear right out of it.

I had always stuck up for him and was ready to take my oath he had played the game; so I had no hesitation when at last he came strolling by—you will remember I was sitting on a tuppenny seat in the Park that fine May morning—I had n't the least hesitation in getting up with rather a shout of welcome; and he, apparently, was just as glad to see me again. He had few friends in London; he had no engagements. We finished that day together, and after that there were other meetings, and now, once in a blue moon, he writes to me.

The last day we had spent together—or, rather, it was weeks—had happened several years before that; in 1917, to be exact. Yes, in the autumn. One remembers it especially, for it was after Allenby took hold and Murray went home with our sincere good wishes; it was before we broke the Turk and pushed up to Jerusalem. Vignolles was in all that, but I was n't; and I have put his story in one piece, though, I dare say, he told it me in several; and perhaps I 've filled in gaps and dwelt a little on the peculiar characteristics of the man. For he is a charac-

ter, rather a rare one, rather of the romantic sort, one of those persistent children of unrest who give our ordinary life and standards the go-by and venture on a world tour of their own.

He was a man past fifty and had always been in the thick of it. That, I imagine, was his passion, the ruling motive of his life. Most people, therefore, would call him an adventurer; the war threw up many such. They flocked home from all the corners of the earth at the great call, and Vignolles was one of them, the only one, however, whom I knew with any intimacy. He had the two South African ribbons, he had a Japanese, he would have had a Bulgarian, only just now they were the enemy, and he had two more which I can't exactly remember that finished off the row. He bore no ill-will whatsoever toward any of his numerous adversaries; indeed, like many of his kind, he often expressed a peculiar horror and detestation of war—of its cruelties, its injustice, its brutalities—though, somehow, he could n't keep away from it. He had abandoned a tea and rubber plantation farther East to be in this one. He had sailed all the way to London, and there he had been refused at the first asking; and then he had re-

turned to his hotel, had dyed his hair, which was prematurely gray, and gone back with a decent lie which made him eligible. He had come to us of the Camel Transport Corps by way of the Yeomanry, and he and I—we were both "old stiffs," though for the nonce disguised as subalterns—had struck up a friendship that was quick and intimate, and salted with our mutual joy in the adjutant, our lord and master, and young enough for either of us to have dandled on a paternal knee.

But to return to that last day, the day before he disappeared. We had risen at dawn as usual, we had been on parade by six, and then had ridden off to exercise our sections. After breakfast, when the camels had been scraped and cleaned and cleared of ticks, we were to lead them out to the water-troughs. One fed twice a day, but one watered only every other day, and the jaunt was always a bit of an excursion. Here in London it seems romantic, and to a tourist watching us it would have looked like something wonderfully picturesque. I can hear the click of his camera and his expressions of delight as we came by. But had he been one of us, he might have made a different song of it.

There was the depot, naked in the sunlight, with its couple of wooden huts for offices, its long rows of tents, and its longer rows of camel lines, all beautifully laid out in the marshy land on the African side of the canal. Brown and baked it was, very much like Vignolles, before it joined the reed beds and the water. It was endurable by day; a hard and healthy life we led, spent mostly on our Arab ponies; but after sundown, to the flies were added the mosquitoes, and to the mosquitoes, the sand-flies. The mosquitoes were the fiercest and the most voracious I have ever known. They would eat through your drill riding-breeches, they would sting through your flannel shirt. If you played a rubber of "auction" after mess, you kept one eye on your cards and another on them; and when at nine or ten you went to bed, diving with all speed under your mosquito-net, in they came after you. Once inside, you lit a candle and hunted them, and when all seemed secure, you went to sleep. But, somehow or other, they would evade you, and when you scratched the places they made, you risked a septic sore.

At sunrise, however, all would be well again, and Vignolles and I and such other subalterns

as were awaiting orders here would meet upon parade. One day's ritual was very like another, except that on every other day we watered. And then all the camels, four of five hundred of them, would march out in a long line, two by two, with an Egyptian driver to each pair. These men wore bright blue gowns—*galabiahs,* they call them—of the same color as the eternal blue of the sky; the camels, and Vignolles and I in khaki, were of the color of the desert; and when the whole line of us stood out in silhouette against those spacious horizons, like a frieze of blue-brown on a blue-brown background, we made a most wonderful picture. This is where the tourist would have come in with his camera.

The last morning—I remember it very well—Vignolles was peculiarly silent as we rode on together; for, out of the depot, we usually left the men and camels to their *reises* and *bash-reises* and enjoyed our freedom and the soft, clear air. Sometimes quite frankly we played the ass, putting our ponies at any obstacle we met, a jump or a hillock, or racing the little beggars over broken ground. But to-day Vignolles was absent and moody, so much so, that at last I asked him what was up.

"You and I are getting shot out; too old," he answered. "I had it from Goffin, the 'quarter,' in the orderly-room. He's rather a pal of mine. I suppose there's a push coming on and they think we won't stick it."

"And we're both as fit as fleas," was my reply. "Still, I suppose it had to come. It was bound to come some day," I added; "but they might have let us crock up decently, like men."

"The Chief's taking no chances—not this time," said Vignolles, briefly. "You and I are going down to Cairo on some garrison job—local transport—carting stores and washing for the hospitals; just the same as sitting tight at home."

"Horses, I suppose, casts and crocks like you and me. By Gad, I don't feel a day more than forty!"

"They don't give a damn about us; I wish I'd lied when I took my commission. I was fool enough to tell the truth." And then, more matter-of-fact, he pursued: "A couple of young 'uns are coming here to-morrow. They'll take all the sound camels and men away with them, and you and I, me lad, 'll be back numbers."

I felt it as much as he did, but, of the two of us, I was rather the more English. "Well, I don't care," was what I answered. "If they don't want us, they don't—and there's an end of it."

"I didn't join up to live in a billet and do a garrison job in Cairo," said Vignolles, brooding. "If I can't be in it, I'm not going to be out of it." And next: "They shoved me out of the Yeomanry because they thought me too old; that's how I got into this institution. Transport isn't so bad, not in open fighting, the sort you get out here; but now they're shoving us out of that as well"; and for a full minute he dwelt on it.

I reflected for a while. The thought had often occurred to me:

"It's all right for you," I now said; "you've only got to ask, and they'll jump at you for Intelligence." To my knowledge he spoke Arabic, French, and Spanish, the first uncommonly well.

"And sit in a ruddy office. No thanks," he answered. "The Arabic's all right; it helps me with this job"; and then he turned and smiled for the first time that morning. "My late C. O. had the same idea; it was before we came out here. He introduced me to an Intelligence-*wallah*—a colonel. Polite way of getting rid

of me. I looked at the chap and he looked at me, and we both hated the sight of each other. He was one of those Regulars that don't know their job, but he 'd taken the brass hat and the wages; and he knew that I knew it and I knew that he knew I knew. No, I could n't work under a thing like that, bluffing half his time and expecting people to carry him the rest of it; and he scooping up the credit till he got found out. No, Transport 's good enough for me," he ended.

We dropped the topic till we came to the drinking-troughs. There were rows and rows of them alongside a canal. Camels take five-and-twenty minutes to fill their skins, and though they go in lean and baggy, they come out round as a barrel with their sides full of it, so you must give them room to expand and not crowd 'em. We let half of the drivers fall out at a time and take a dip in the fresh water. Some went in with a net and caught gray mullet that were leaping. Fine swimmers they were, and, though not much to look at as they plodded along with the camels, they stripped like statues—like bronze statues.

Vignolles was still brooding. I remember one

curious remark he made; there was a good deal of truth in it.

"I suppose the worst day in a woman's life," he said, "is the day she realizes that men don't care a damn about her. Sooner or later it's bound to come—the day she's finished and the youth gone out of her. We two are a bit like that, getting fired and sent down to a garrison job."

After lunch we went across the canal together and saw the field cashier. We owed a mess bill and Vignolles suggested paying it. He drew the usual fiver and cashed a fat check for allowances. He must have let them run a few months or got tangled up over his transfer. When we returned we got orders to dish out a full equipment to the men, marching out state and winter scale. This kept us busy till nightfall. The Gyppoes were like children receiving presents off a Christmas tree, as they pranced about with their overcoats, their boots, their canvas water-bottles, their shirts, and the rest of it. To the simple mind it was all so much treasure-trove.

At dinner Vignolles asked the adjutant whether he might take the next day in Port Said. He got his leave all right and went off bright

and early; nor had I a word or a sign of him till he turned up, two years later, that May morning in the Park.

He had gone off to Port Said, but we in the depot had been uncommon busy. Not that I was in it over-much. I looked on most of that day, reading my death-sentence. The two young officers had turned up, and, led by the major and the adjutant, had taken the pick of the camels. The men had been vetted and inspected, all gay in their new togs. The pack-saddles had been counted out and the coarse rope nets that go along with them and in which you sling the stuff. The forage had come in from the supply dump on the canal. It looked like business at last. Next morning they would all start out, leaving the depot empty and Vignolles and me behind. But no Vignolles appeared, and I was alone as I watched the long lines loading, the brutes down on their knees, the packs made fast across their humps, the rations slung into the nets; and next their long necks bobbing as they passed out with the drivers that had once belonged to Vignolles and to me, and Achmet the *bash-reis,* flitting to and fro on his *hagheen.*

There were the two young officers in charge of it all, and Coldicott Pasha, the inspector himself, inspecting; and off they marched, out of the depot, then to Kantara Station and the bridge that crosses the canal, and then away into the Sinai desert and off to Palestine. I watched them swaying down the road—a mile of them. I had little or nothing else to do. My work was over; and though it was morning, it felt like evening, like autumn, like the end of something that had been warm and rich and strong. Yes, Vignolles was right.

I turned at last and went back slowly to the empty depot. The inspector himself was in the mess-tent—a large man, one of Kitchener's men, with all the Egyptian ribbons. He had created the corps and was its father. I remember that most of us were rather afraid of him and silent and abashed when he sat down at the head of the long table, the major, very respectful, on one side, the adjutant, all aglow, on the other. He left after lunch, and we subalterns breathed more freely. Isaacs, who did some odd job in the store-tents, took four fingers of whisky; Hamilton, the quartermaster, was pleased because the great man had spoken to

him; and the subaltern with alcoholic objections, whose name I misremember, was hurt because he had been ignored. As one of the finished, the extinct, I had made myself as small as possible. It was only after the Chief had gone that somebody asked what had become of Vignolles.

He had been to Port Said, was all we knew of him.

"Humph," said the adjutant.

And that, in so far as I was concerned, seemed the end of Vignolles.

In his tent the bulk of his things were nicely packed and all in order. He had left us a home-made bed, the canvas rather busted, the frame and legs quite sound, his mosquito-net, and an old uniform, as souvenirs. The mess-servants collared these. The rest, after the usual inquiry and all manner of reports and writing, was duly forwarded to his next of kin, a married sister.

Thus ended Vignolles, who had passed out of my ken, till suddenly he came strolling by that fine May morning. I, poor wretch, had gone down to Cairo, just as he had predicted, and no sooner had I been introduced to the worn-out

steeds, and taken stock of the wagons, staff, and stables now in my charge, than one of those accursed mosquitoes found me out. I had a stiff dose of malaria and went home in the spring.

Not so my friend, however. But let us listen while he unfolds his own story:

"I was a B. F.," was how he began it. "I was a B. F.," he repeated. For the benefit of the uninitiate one may explain that these initials stand for a certain kind of fool. "I always am a B. F. when I follow an impulse instead of acting according to the book. And yet, by Jove, half the fun one gets in life comes out of these impulses, and most of the pain as well, I suppose! The pain does, right enough. You remember, I went off to Port Said early that morning? I called at the bank there and cashed three checks, five pounds a time and dated three consecutive days. The cashier said that was all he was allowed to do. Then I drew a fourth check for a hundred and told them to collect it in London and open a credit for me when they got the brass. I dare say all that came out at at the inquiry. Must have looked pretty dirty—but these things can't be helped when you're fol-

lowing an impulse instead of sticking to the rules. I rather overdid it; but I was n't going to be out of the show. You knew that? When I 'd done with the bank, I had a bathe in the sea, and I lay out in the sun and thought things over. Next I went to a Greek barber's and got a fresh coat of dye, jet-black; made me look ten years younger. No need to stain my face. I was well burnt, neck and all; and I 'm by way of being a brunette; had a French grandfather, regular old Othello—came from Arles. Next I had a darned good lunch at the club and read the papers and slept and sprawled in chairs. Then I went back to the sea-front and picked up with a Syrian girl and her mamma and stood them tea at the Casino. Mamma asked me whether I was married and told me the girl would get two thousand on her wedding-day. I liked looking at a white girl, or almost white; had n't seen one for months and months. We talked in Arabic a little, but they preferred French—more civilized, I suppose. Papa came along presently and they asked me to visit them. The girl was round and plump and had what novel-writers call 'mysterious' eyes. The mystery is easily solved. The mystery is that there

is n't any mystery. It 's all in the shop-window, so to speak. 'You will call?' they pressed me, and the mother said, 'When?' I said that, being in the army, I could n't quite tell, but, if they would give me their name and address, I would write. I gave them my name and then we separated. The girl was very soft and gentle, something like a dove. Mamma and Papa were fat and coarse. She ought to have left them behind when she went out hunting. They made one look ahead too much. Next I dined at the Marina," he pursued, "and there I met a Hollander I 'd known out East; first officer on one of their mail-packets.

"'Who 's going to win the war?' he said, when we 'd got comfortable.

"'What war?' I asked; and then we talked rubber and old faces out yonder, and he said if I was sick of it he 'd take me off to the Dutch Indies.

"'At your age—with your dyed hair and moustache—you 're an old fool!' he said. And, by Gad, he was right! I took the last train back to Kantara, and he walked with me to the station.

"'If you 'd been a German,' he said, as we

shook hands, 'you 'd have come along with us and got out of it. Plenty good jobs going in Java or Sumatra.'

"I grinned at that.

"'Not me!' I said. 'So now you know who 's going to win the war?' He looked at me for quite a while before he tumbled to it and laughed. Thick-headed fellows, these Dutchmen.

"At Kantara I sat out on the bank of the canal and smoked a pipe and felt very happy. You see, I 'd taken my line, burnt my boats, knew exactly what I was in for. And I was n't going to be out of it; I 'd got round that corner. I enjoyed the moon, the few big stars that held their own with it, and all that ghostly splendor. The bridge was up and great ships with their searchlights blazing came and went, like ghosts of ships that once had ridden clear under the sun. I heard the train start from the station on the eastern side, the one that runs bang through the desert into Palestine. I heard it till I lost it. I heard the challenges of sentries on the other bank and fellows answering; and then, at midnight, I went back to the depot. Our watchmen were asleep as usual; they always

went to sleep after the orderly officer had made his last round. You can't expect a Gyppo to keep awake unless he feels like it, and these *nabatchis* had been on duty all day. There was nobody about. One heard the camels mutter and grumble, and one or two of you fellows were snoring. I sneaked into my tent, and when I came out again I was exactly like a driver—just an ordinary Gyppo, all complete. You remember we gave the men an entire outfit that last afternoon, marching out state, winter scale. Well, I 'd kept one lot back for myself. Perhaps it was this re-equipment that gave me the idea. Ali Selim, one of my drivers, had to go short. I pinched his togs and water-bottle and blanket—the whole blooming outfit. He made a bit of a fuss, but I said *'Tamam,'* and he trusted me. Ali Selim and I were rather pals; all my men and I were rather pals. You see, I could talk to them and understand them. They liked me in their way. You can tell that by the songs they sing as they go marching. You remember how one of them improvises a line and the others all repeat it, and there 's a refrain to match which comes over and over again? They 're poets in a primitive, easy way of their own. They used to sing

very nice things about me to my face, and I believe they meant them. You got it, too. There was one day when you 'd walked into them pretty heavily; they 'd let the lines get a bit musty, and the adjutant had made a fuss and you 'd passed it on—cursed and damned 'em uphill, I suppose, and tried to talk to 'em. They made a song about you that day. 'This man is a bore,' it began—that 's about the gist of it in English. 'His wife deceives him and his children are another's.' I don't suppose you knew what they were yapping about; in fact, you said you liked to hear them singing as they marched. I didn't enlighten you; but I told Achmet, the *bash-reis,* that if they sang any more of that particular ditty they 'd be flogged and that you were a noble officer who had done his duty. They all grinned and changed the subject and pretended to be sorry and repentant. You know what kids they are?"

"And Ali Selim?" I suggested, as he paused over this anecdote and smiled to himself a little as much as to me.

Vignolles resumed:

"Oh, yes. I thought you 'd be interested"; and after a moment's reflection: "Well, here was

I, and here was Ali Selim, whose togs I 'd pinched. He was a middle-aged man who 'd married a young wife, a virgin. He 'd found the money for that, but he had n't found the money to have his *fantasia*. That 's the wedding celebration, the bridal night, the drums and dancing, the feast and all the rest of it. If you marry a widow or a *divorcée, she* can go without; but a young girl has to have her *fantasia*. It costs money and the bridegroom has to pay; he 's introduced to his bride and the joys of Paradise as soon as it is over. Ali Selim had n't the money to pay for his *fantasia;* that's why he joined the Camel Transport. He meant to earn it with us and go back home and have his wedding-day in earnest. So far he 'd only put his name to the contract and handed over the money for the bride. When his time was up, he was going back to his village to have his *fantasia* and moons of bliss. The old dog told me all about it. 'A virgin, high-breasted.' Being a villager, of course he 'd seen her—they only wear their veils when they go into the towns.

"I 'd fixed up with Achmet, the *bash-reis,* that Ali Selim was to be one of the picket on that particular night. I found him fast asleep in

the forage-bin and dreaming of Aziza. He was a tall, dried-up old fellow, a bit like me, but, I dare say, twenty years younger. They age more rapidly than we do. I shook him awake and he came to with a start, and when he saw it was only another driver he began to be very rude. But having cursed my religion and said the worst about my father, he suddenly realized that I was his *Zabet* and pulled himself together.

"'You hop off to your tent,' I said, 'and get your things together and come back here. Then you can go to your village and have your *fantasia*. Here are twenty pounds for you'; and I showed him the notes in the moonlight.

"'*Hader, Effendim,*' said he, and went off. He asked no questions; it is not their way. They've been slaves, or something near it, for so many thousands of years that they still believe in miracles.

"Ali Selim came back with his few belongings.

"'Now give me your identity disk,' I commanded. He took it off his neck and I hung it round my own. Then I handed him the twenty pounds. He smiled all over his face and stowed

"You hop off to your tent," I said, "and get your things together and come back here"

the money away inside his *galabiah.* 'Now you must go,' I said. 'If you are careful and keep away from the canal, you 'll be home in a couple of days.' His village was a place called Abu Zeid, not far from Zagazig. He grinned a confident grin; he was sure he could make it. I went with him as far as the marsh on the edge of the depot. 'There are fishermen and boatmen on the water above here,' I said; 'any one of them would help you.'

"'Have no fear, *Effendim,*' he answered; and then he took my hand and I let him kiss it. It is their custom. 'My own father has not been to me as you have been,' he said; and the old dog meant it—I think he meant it. You know I always liked these men; they were like children"; and Vignolles, grown thoughtful, puffed away at his cigar for a long moment.

"I had no fear," he resumed. "Once clear of the depot and if he kept away from what we called the Canal Zone, Ali Selim would be all right. One Gyppo in a dirty *galabiah* is very like another. I went back to the lines and took his place; and next morning I fell in with the others and was given my two camels and out I marched with the rest. You may have seen me?

I certainly saw you; and our young friend the adjutant, pink and proud of himself. I'd taken a rise out of him at last! Made me chuckle; did n't know what a fool I was making of myself just then. It is possible that some of the Gyppoes spotted me, but to them it would be some deep white man's game, and they'd naturally keep out of it. I just carried on as though I were Ali Selim. I had his kit, and the identity disk round my neck was stamped with his number, while my own was hidden away in my belt. You looked as though you had a proper old hump as we came trailing by; but, by Jove, you were the wise man and I was all kinds of a damned old fool!" And here he paused and let me see to the end how he had managed it.

"We marched to Karm, clean across the Sinai desert," he pursued, "and I stuck it all right. We only did two miles an hour, and not more of that than was good for us. I enjoyed this part of the business; perfect weather; only one sandstorm. The two young officers were pretty decent and did n't worry us except when we got in other people's way. Most of us stuck it; only three or four fell out. You ought to read the story of Napoleon's army on this same excursion;

makes your flesh creep. Those who fell out were finished, worse than finished. We marched all night and slept in the middle of the day. It was clean and fresh, no flies worth mentioning, no mosquitoes, a scorpion or two every once in a while, and lots of sand-rats—jerboas, I think they call 'em—and lizards; and we saw gazelle, and there were hawks and eagles. It 's an up-and-down country of sand shaped by the wind, with shifting hills and valleys, all one color of desolate brown under a sky that 's blue all over. And then you 're never very far from the sea; that 's sapphire and emerald, with a white edge where it breaks in little waves. At night everything comes closer.

"We watered at wells or off the pipe-line—they 'd laid the Nile water clean through to Palestine; and there were oases with Bedouin and mangy camels and date-palms and ripe dates, at Katia and Romani and El Arish. At El Arish we got a bathe in the sea, camels and all, and it did us good. I 'd got a sort of a grizzled beard by then and my own mother would n't have known me. We met all kinds of things on the way, and there was a wire-road. They 'd put down that as well—a net of wire, five or

six yards wide, pegged down on the sand the whole way through the desert. You could march, or drive a car on it, just like on a metaled road. The Londoners and the Irish came along and said all sorts of rude things to us poor devils plodding in the sand; but, I lay, we said ruder. And Anzacs and Aussies on horseback. We could n't match what they said; big-hearted chaps, though. And the Yeomanry —my old lot. They let us alone. Gad, what would n't I have given to be along with them again! I looked out for my old charger, but could n't find her. She had a nose like a lady's cheek and slim legs like a duchess. . . . But we 'll let that go and return to the procession.

"There were Indian cavalry and the real camel corps; and some of our old oonts started getting affectionate when the ladies came along. Confounded nuisance they are when they go *magnoon* and throw up their heads and blow out that film-thing, and lash with their ridiculous tails. My two gentlemen behaved themselves. And so we tumbled into Rafa and out again as far as Karm; and, Jasus, but I was dead beat! I 'd walked the whole breadth of Sinai and a

bit over; but I 'm glad I 've seen it. We kicked up coins and broken pottery in some places; there must have been water and cities out there years and years ago. I 'd had the sand and the sea and the stars, and an air like milk, and the prologue of an immortal story; and I 'd seen old Allenby dodging about in his big Rolls-Royce. He even took the trouble to look at us, and gave us a better salute than we gave him. Well, I 'd had all that, and nothing much to do but admire it all.

"We 'd stayed two days at Rafa, at the advanced depot, and there we were re-sorted and pooled along with a tribe of others; so that, when I went out on the last stage, I was among fresh men and animals. Not one of our old lot in the whole caboodle! We were in Palestine now, or over against it. Palestine is a green place, with trees and cactus-hedges, if one comes upon it out of the desert. But just then it was all burnt up, really. You should see it in the spring! And there were hills in the distance and the Holy Bible. It 's the landscape you read of and get read to you in church or when you 're a kid; and there are wells all along the sand-dunes on the edge of the sea. I think the sea-water gets

filtered somehow and the salt taken out of it as it passes through the sand into the wells."

He paused for a moment here to fill a pipe, an ancient brier that he had fished out of his pocket. His cigar had come to an end, and he had declined a fresh one; and then I, seizing on the opportunity and rather curious about these *fellaheen* camel-men that he had so taken for granted, said: "What do the Gyppoes talk about among themselves? When they get going? I 've often wondered." And, indeed, I had, as deaf and dumb myself, so to put it, I had seen these drivers squatting before their tents for hours and keeping up an eternal conversation, always dramatic, always eloquent, as though they were laying bare high secrets of state or expounding the mysteries of the universe.

Vignolles laughed.

"What we talked about, or what they talk about? Money and women mostly," he answered; "same as people do in Europe, only it 's different money and different women. And then there 's eating and drinking and one's relatives, and land and crops and things; but it 's money and women mostly. Can't say it 's always very respectable."

"And the war?" I asked next. "What it was being fought for and why? and democracy and the League of Nations?"

Vignolles laughed again.

"They did n't know and they did n't care; no business of theirs! They got their keep and so many piasters a day; that was all they thought about the war. I 've met staff-officers who thought no further."

"And aeroplanes and tractors, and the pipe-line and the railways, and all our other devilments—what about these?"

"Magic; magic of the unbeliever. Satan 's always in league with the unbeliever, and Allah protects the faithful. The Koran makes no mention of aeroplanes, so they despise them."

"And what about their religion?" I asked. "You 've just mentioned Allah and the Koran, and people are always gassing about Islam and Mahomet."

Vignolles hesitated.

"That 's rather a poser," he said at last. "You see, it 's a habit, a state of mind, rather than a faith. And there 's not much love in it; that 's where Christianity has them beat. We 're always in love or about to be in love; they 're not

troubled that way; they get too much of it, if anything. And so they fall back on a code; it 's very good for one if one sticks to it. Mahomet was something of a physician as well as a man of the world, and so he prescribes cold water and physical drill—they call it ablutions and prostrations—and fasts and continence and no alcohol, and a few prayers just to clinch matters. If he could have made the world stand still and be exactly the same in London as in Mecca, in Tokio as in the Yemen; if he could have canceled the Renaissance, the Roman Church, and the Discovery of America—I omit a dozen similar trifles—Mahomet would have been all right. And if you 're still living in the seventh century and the climate 's pretty warm and living 's cheap and sufficient, then Mahomet 's a prophet. Our men were seventh-century; one or two of them were bloody-minded fanatics, especially when they quarreled about the direction of Mecca. You turn your face that way when you pray. They had a fight about it, and Ibrahim bit off the end of Khalil's nose. Most religions seem to tend in that direction if one 's properly aroused"; and Vignolles ruminated, lingering for a moment, so it seemed, with his own God, the

compassionate, the merciful, enskied above the rancors of our little creeds.

"Well, you 'd got as far as Palestine," I prompted him at last. "And what happened after that?"

"The show came off all right; you 've read about it, and so have most people. And I was in it. One show 's very like another, but this was rather an uncommon and romantic business. I suppose I 'm one of those moths that can't keep out of the flame; and so are you, and so are most of us. I 've often thought that if the Belgians and the French had just sat tight and let the Hun march on and on and on, and smoked their pipes and looked at the fools marching, even the Hun would have seen the joke at last and turned to the Kaiser, and said, 'What the hell are we doing here?" Instead of looking on and smoking their pipes, the French fought 'em. Very natural and human thing to do; I 'd have done it myself. But if we were angels instead of men and women, we 'd just sit tight and leave war to the fools."

"But the Turk was—something more than a fool," I ventured.

"Quite right," answered Vignolles, thought-

fully. "He 's got a certain point of view. It don't square with ours; it can't live in the same street with ours. So I don't blame him as much as I blame the Hun. Nothing the Hun loves better than living in our street; can't keep him out of it. If you chuck him out at the door, in he comes by the window.

"Well, I carried on and saw the Turk take the knock," he resumed; "and as he belongs to the dark ages and I don't, I was n't sorry for him. It was a fine sight, lots of cavalry; a good, open, honest show it was after the first hard biff. We 'd have finished them off then and there instead of a year later, if we could have used the whole of our army instead of the half of it. And when we 'd got 'em fairly on the run and the rains came down and slowed the pace and washed us out, so to speak, I began to feel that I was an old, old man, and that I 'd have done better to have gone down to Cairo like a good boy and relieved some younger fellow, if they could have found one. I stuck it out, though. I remember two of our Gyppoes got killed by a bomb; they ought to have thrown themselves flat on their bellies instead of sprinting. There was one on the right of me and one on the left

of me. I envied the poor devils. They were at peace; it was all over. One of 'em twitched a bit, but he could n't feel anything. I envied them. And next I thought of the women in the mud village on the Nile, and the children, and the howl they would set up till God comforted them. It 's these people that war hits, not proud fellows like you and me.

"I stuck it out," he pursued; "and, well, we camel-drivers saved the situation. It had been difficult enough in the dry weather, when half the army had to stand by because there was n't enough water; but when the rains came it looked as though the other half would have to shut up shop as well. The whole country had turned into a quaking bog, and all the wheeled transport went to blazes. Armies are n't like voters; they can't live on air and promises. The navy carried on along the coast, but the Horse Transport and the regimental limbers had got stuck in the sand before we started; and now the tractors, vans, and lorries were all stuck in the mud. But we camels kept it up somehow. Thousands and thousands of us there were, working in three echelons, each lot doing a stage; and though lots of the poor brutes split when they

slipped up in it, and lots lay down and went to pot from sheer exhaustion, the most of us hung on. I had about fourteen different kinds of fever when we started for Jerusalem.

"We 'd carried water, and we 'd carried forage, and we 'd carried beef and biscuit; we 'd carried all sorts of truck, and now we were on ammunition. The last day I was out and about the Jacko guns had found us, and one of the camels took a direct hit and went up like a packet of fireworks. I told you I had about sixteen kinds of fever; I suppose it was that made me stand fast when the others ran. Can't expect a Gyppo to stand fast with a camel-load of eighteen-pounder shells going off like a bunch of rockets. There was the officer and me getting a move on the convoy; the camels stood like heroes and did as they were told. The officer cursed in English, and it did me good to hear him; and I suppose I cursed one better, but he must have been too busy to notice. I don't remember any more of it till I woke up in a Gyppo hospital, with a hole down one side of me and no temperature to speak of. Lord, but I was happy to be warm and cozy and well out of it!

"There was a Syrian doctor and an Armenian

dresser and a Jew and lots of Copts and Moslems, and they all looked after me like angels—seemed they had special orders. I'd behaved rather decently, it appeared; and I was Ali Selim el Tantawi, so they said, having read the number off my identity disk or some nominal roll or other, or, maybe, it's what I told 'em. And they had n't pinched my money, either. It was all O. K. with the other disk inside my belt and the fag-end of my check-book and half-a-dozen odd papers.

"The officer looked in—the same kid who'd been in charge of that last convoy. He could n't talk much, but he had lots of baccy and cigarettes and said there was plenty more where these came from. I felt rather a cad for letting him *quaess* away in Arabic; and he'd got nothing out of the show, not even a mention! I found a Gazette one day and hunted about for him; but all the office-*wallahs* had n't forgotten their noble selves, you bet your boots on it!

"They let me out in the spring, and I was sent to the advanced depot. It had moved north to Ludd, somewhere between Jaffa and Jerusalem, out on the plain, with the blue sea on one side and blue hills on the other. Nothing much to

do there except eat and drink and sleep. They 'd a sort of infirmary for us to get well in. I got well. It was a wonderful place, all among orange-groves in blossom; smelt like a thousand brides, and I 'd just missed the almonds. There were scarlet tulips and beds of dusky iris and banks of great yellow daisies. They let us wander where we liked, and the smell of it and the sight of it made me feel new and beautiful. Most of the men sat still and basked and would n't go out except when there was a girl calling; but I found Bedouin camps and Jew colonies and black Jews from the Yemen. There was a Moslem bailiff in one of the farms who wanted me to marry his daughter, a widow, going cheap; and I met a woman who asked me to sell her a camel—she had twenty pounds Turkish in gold that she brought out of her bosom—and there was a Jew farmer who offered me a job of hoeing in his vineyard. And I met jackals and pi-dogs and a harlot from Surafend. It was just like living in the Bible, except for Allenby and his men and the banging of guns beyond Jaffa, and the aeroplanes that came and went, and the railway-line that had come up and the new ones they were building.

"I got as far as the sea at Jaffa and saw a street of shops again, and took a *shuf* at the Jewish suburb packed with Zionists. Intellectual-looking lot of blokes; too much brains and not enough beef. It 'll take 'em three generations to get going. And I hopped on a lorry one fine morning and wound up into the hills and landed plumb in Jerusalem. It smelt like a 'jakes'—I think that 's what Shakespeare calls it—but when you got on the Mount of Olives and looked down on the city and over to the Dead Sea and the Mountains of Moab, you forgot all your troubles and even forgave the Turk and how he 'd failed on sanitation. I suppose Jerusalem grows on one. I could n't give it a fair chance. They let me in at the mosque—Omar, is n't it?—a perfect place. I sat in the sun like a lizard in one corner of the big square where the women come for water and Time seems to have left off, and present, past, and future are all one. Ever read Josephus? The Old Testament 's poetry and Josephus is the prose of it. They tried to kick me out of the church when I went up the hill again; but I told the priests that I was a Copt, and then it seemed to be all right. I followed a party of reverent Tommies

in charge of a padre and heard all about it. They said it was 'a bit thick'; but who was I to contradict them? Religion 's rather an industry up at Jerusalem, same as in Rome, same as in Mecca. When I 'd done I squatted down at the corner outside the posh hotel and waited for the lorry. The crowd did one good. I 've never seen anything like it; a human menagerie. Licked all the zoos. Bedouin, Australians, all sorts of Jews, Indians, West Indians, Gyppoes, and real live female Yankees dishing out money or medicine or something. I 've left out priests and nuns and such like. Some came from Abyssinia and were long and black and bony. I forgot all about the lorry and had to get a lift on a Ford van. Very decent fellow in it. Intelligence, I believe. He took me as far as Ramleh, and then I walked. They called me into the office three days later and told me that my time was up and that I could go back to my home whenever I wanted; and if I liked to sign on again, they 'd be glad to have me. They 'd give me a *reis's* job and a *reis's* pay.

"There was a wad of money owing to Ali Selim, and I got that. He 'd had my twenty pounds and done nothing for it; and he 'd had

the *fantasia* and the henna and the high-breasted virgin into the bargain, which I had n't. Not by a long chalks! And there was my own pay, all dried up, I supposed, and me posted as missing or something worse. I 've a sister—she 'd hear about it—a good sort, though married to a stock-broker who dresses every night for dinner and can't talk anything but shop and golf and 'auction.' I sent her a picture post-card from Jerusalem and signed it 'Tonino.' She 'd know it was from me. She 's forgiven me all right, though my brother-in-law can't get over it.

"Well, I 'd got a wad of money and a paper to take me home to Abu Zeid," Vignolles pursued, reverting once more to the main argument, "and a squad of us time-expireds and crocks and whatnots was marched down to the station, and back we went to Egypt in an open truck, all very friendly and rejoicing and full of plans and wickedness, and packed like herrings in a tin.

"I did n't see much, because it went dark soon after we started, but we left the scent of the orange groves behind us, and the twisted olive-trees, and the miles of barley you come to lower down. I saw all that, and then it was night and we were making for the desert. I slept

through it this time instead of walking. At Kantara East we got out and were marched over the canal to Kantara West; and I could see the depot where I had started from about six months back. Had n't changed much; the men were getting their breakfast.

"They gave me a ticket to Zagazig, third-class on the State Railway, but I did n't get there. I wanted to see Cairo and the Pyramids again and the wonders of Memphis. Sakkara, they call it nowadays; it 's a better period than Thebes. I went down to the stables at Kasr-el-Nil and Abu Ella and asked the drivers if they knew you —an old officer—*kadim?*

" 'The fat one with the red face? He came and went,' they answered. So I knew you 'd got out of it.

"And when I 'd done with Cairo and Sakkara and the Pyramids and the two museums," Vignolles resumed, "and all the cinemas and the *Mille et Un Nuits,* and the theaters in Emad el Din, and refused a job at a mosque and another at a brothel, I powdered myself more than usual with Keating's and paid my bill at the hotel in Clot Bey where I 'd lodged, and went off to the Fayoum; it 's the only green bit of Egypt that

is n't hand-made and flat-ironed. And after that I got a passage on a boat or two—or was it three?—and sailed down the Nile to all the tombs and temples. It was growing warm and oveny, but in a dirty *galabiah* and next to no underwear you don't feel it. I had a six-weeks' holiday that passed like a dream, doing just what I liked and sleeping mostly under stars and moonlight. The *fellaheen* Gyppoes are much the same as other peasantry. If they 're decently governed by honest men they 're like little children. When they 're stirred up by agitators and priests, they see red and run *amok*. They treated me like a king and hardly charged for it. I only used my fists once, and that was in the tourist country; a damned guide was making rude remarks about one of our Sisters. Luxor was full of army nurses, and V. A. D.'s, and spoony officers. The girl and the major she was with both offered me money when I explained matters. Most remarkable English I used to the major and 'No, O beloved!' says I to the girl, in Arabic; and she blushed so prettily and put her money away, though she only guessed the gist of it. A fair Saxon girl she was, with straw-colored hair, long legs, pink cheeks, a throat

like cream, and eyes the color of forget-me-nots. I had n't stood face to face with one like that for ages.

"The officer grinned at me as I slunk off, and said, 'Some of these Arabs are n't bad fellows.' Lucky young dog! But he had n't deserted. I knew that, when my time was up, I 'd have to try to get hold of the money I 'd banked at Port Said, and then sit tight in Arab Town till I came across another Dutchman or some Greek sea-captain who 'd do anything for a price. Or else I 'd have to re-engage and do a depot job till the war ended. Can't say I fancied it!

"I got back to Cairo all right and bought a ticket for as far as they 'd let me go without a permit. I could have got one for nothing, but I 'd money left, and I did n't want to be messed about by native officials who 'd want bribes or a *bint* or some other species of corruption. I 'd only got to go back to the depot and say I was Ali Selim el Tantawi, and I 'd get a *reis's* job straight away and stick there or go up to Ludd. I hung about on the station platform and waited for the train. It came in all right, and while it was standing, who should turn up but the inspec-

tor himself, old Coldicott Pasha, and a little staff colonel with blue tabs and a clean-shaved face! I 'd seen him up at Karm, bossing the supply people and everybody else, a clever, brainy-looking little bloke. Seemed to know what he was doing, and no frills and no fuss and no standing on his dignity. I take off my hat to him, though as a rule I 'm agin' staff officers. Men go rotten in an office unless their heart 's with us poor devils who do the job.

"The inspector and the staff colonel strolled up and down; and, 'There 's this fellow Ali Selim. I 'm getting off at Zagazig,' I heard the pasha say; and the little colonel nodded. I could n't catch any more; but, you bet, I had pricked up my ears and was thinking. And next the Chief's body-servant, a good-looking Gyppo, came up and said he 'd put the suit-case in and would his Excellency be seated? I could follow that; and then the two big-pots nodded to one another and separated. The little chap went back to his car, and the inspector got into a first-class coach with the paper. The Gyppo servant went third-class with me. He 'd got fine clothes, and thought a devil of a lot of him-

self, being servant to a pasha. The inspector was really a high government official who 'd been lent to the army, as you know.

"The servant laid down the law to us poor wretches in cotton *galabiahs*. He and his master were going to Zagazig on some government business, and then to Abu Zeid to do honor to an Egyptian—a brave man, a regular lion, who had killed a score of Turks—cut their ruddy heads off, dishonored their women, done all sorts of gory things. The pasha had money for this hero, five pounds, and a parchment written with his marvelous deeds. Yes, what this man had done was written down! Future generations might read it. Truly, he was the Hero of the Age! The servant had packed the pasha's leather box and put in the scroll and the paper with the money. The pasha had asked him twice whether all was in order, and he had not failed. The whole coach listened to him as he told this story. 'Twenty Turks!' they cried. 'Truly, this Egyptian is a lion!'

"'All Egyptians are lions,' said a traveling student in a silk caftan and shirt: 'they could eat up these English dogs in one mouthful if it so pleased them.'

"'By Allah, they could!' cried one young man, grown wildly excited.

"'And you, O Father?' The student had turned to me.

"'The English are lion-tamers,' I answered him. 'They have lions in their country, but they keep them on a chain and teach them to catch dogs like you. When they have caught them, the lions are commanded to let them go.'

"The student winced at this, as did three or four others among the men in trousers or caftans, but the *fellaheen* and the women were on my side.

"One of the women, a Bedawi with a keen eye, had the courage to say, 'By Allah, this old rig is right! The English are men and women like ourselves, and they are all lions. I have seen Kitchener Bashaw, and my belly turned to water.' . . . It went on like that and worse till we got to Zagazig. There I got out and walked to Abu Zeid.

"The Chief did his business in the town, and his car overtook me as we entered the village. Really, it must have been the *mudir's* car; he's the governor of the district. Our friend the body-servant sat proudly next the driver; and

the *mudir* had a frock coat, and a red tarboosh on his head, and an order with a blue-and-yellow ribbon. He was no end of a swell. And there was Coldicott Pasha in uniform, with his two rows of decorations, and the headman of the village, a fat old rascal with a huge stomach and silk caftan, and a low tarboosh with a big blue tassel and a white cloth wound round it—a regular old-fashioned Gyppo. I joined them, so to speak, and watched the arrival and all the ceremony.

"It was a big village, with a square and a mosque, and the population in its best clothes, and hens and donkeys and camels and water-buffalo all mixed up with everybody, and pigeons overhead; and drawn up in the center was the hero of the age, Ali Selim el Tantawi. Behind him stood a young woman with the end of her head-dress stuck into her mouth—they don't wear the veil in these outlying villages unless they 're rich and important—and she was pretty enough to do without it. A pure Beddo, with a fine nose and small features, but almost black. Her I took to be the Aziza who had come to him in his dreams. But they were both of them very wide awake just now, as the *ghaffirs* cleared a

space and everybody cried, 'Shut up!' His Excellency stepped forward and made a speech and handed Ali Selim his hard-won fiver and the parchment, which was read aloud to us, recounting my great deeds—I suppose they were mine—below Jerusalem.

"It was the rummiest go I've ever been in," went on Vignolles, after the gust of Homeric laughter which had shaken us both had spent itself. "'The perfection of comedy!' There was that rascal Ali Selim, accepting everything without moving so much as the tail of an eyelid; there were Aziza and the crowd, doing exactly the same; there was the *omdeh,* who would claim a commission on the five pounds for not giving the show away; and the innocent *mudir.* I believe he was innocent. But the most innocent of all, if I except the hens and donkeys and the water-buffalo, was old Coldicott Pasha himself. It was good policy to do what he was doing, and I suppose that was mainly why it was being done, a sort of propaganda act. But he went through it splendidly, with a fine, soldierly seriousness, and a touch of broad humor at the end, just as Kitchener Pasha, his bygone patron and master, himself might have done it; some-

thing about keeping the five pounds for the circumcision ceremony, when Gamila—that means the Beautiful One—had borne the lion a lion cub. Everybody laughed and yelled when he had done; in fact, under the circumstances, I'm surprised they didn't have hysterics. *'Yahia el Basha!'* they cried, and they meant it. Most of them thought him a fool, like all the English. But an honest fool, which is ever so much better than being a clever rogue. They love an honest man, do these Egyptians. As one of their wisest once said to me, 'We have brains enough—too much brains. The English are fools, but they are honest; and honesty is what we need. By Allah, we need it! That is why I am for the English, and may God prosper them!'

"But Coldicott Pasha was no fool; indeed, I have often suspected that he smelt a rat, but that he was far too clever to disturb it. He let them shout and yell and he moved no muscle of his grim old face. He only smiled with his eyes as he let the crowd fawn on him and went back to his car. The *mudir* and the body-servant hopped in and off they drove. I followed them—thinking—thinking pretty hard.

"On the station platform at Zagazig I saw the

pasha again. He had dismissed the *mudir* and was walking slowly up and down. It was the hour of sunset, and the train would n't be in till long past nine. He was alone and evidently enjoying the relief of it. The evening hour is made for solitude and meditation, and I dare say he was going over the day's events. This is where I came in.

"Like the lady in the train, my belly turned to water when I first found the simple idea of going up to him and saying, 'I 'm Lieutenant Vignolles, the deserter.' But the moment after I also recalled that I was Ali Selim el Tantawi, the Lion of the Age and the rightful owner of that five pounds and parchment history.

"I bowed low and announced myself. I don't know where I found the cheek to do it, but some spring or clockwork inside of me went off with a click, and there I was.

" 'Who are you?' asked the inspector.

"In perfect English I repeated what I had said; and next I produced my identity disk and slipped down my *galabiah* and showed him the long scar in my side. We were alone there in the twilight at the end of the empty platform, between trains and at the hour when most

Gyppoes are praying or pretending. It sounds extraordinary, or would to men whose idea of a railway-station is Charing Cross, or even a country station outside a little town.

"And then, 'I 'm also one of your subalterns, sir,' I said; 'Vignolles—I don't know whether you remember—'

" 'So you 're Vignolles?' he had cut me short.

"I admitted it.

" 'And all those people were fooling me. I thought there was something queer about 'em.' He said that more to himself than he said it to me. 'Well, what can I do for you?' he asked next. 'Put you under arrest, have you court-martialed? What is it?'

"I told him how I had been ordered down to Cairo, and how I had felt as young and fit as most people, and how I had gone to Port Said and come back and turned camel-driver and bought off the true Ali Selim and gone up country with the draft. 'You were quite right, sir, and I was absolutely wrong. I *was* too old,' I had ended it—a nice slim sketch of how I had gone *magnoon*.

"He was interested and he made me fill the outlines. And so we went right through the

story—the tramp across the desert, and then from Rafa to Karm with the company to which I had been posted, and how we had carried on when everything else got stuck and went to pot. The old beggar encouraged me. 'Go on,' he ordered. 'I want you to go on,' he said, as keen and hot as mustard, though he hardly showed it, except by imposing his will upon my own. Of course I went on, and he heard me out to the end and jogged me and asked questions.

"'Thank you, Mr. Vignolles,' he said, when I had finished.

"And then, 'I don't mind going back,' I said, 'but I'd only be a nuisance. I couldn't stick a second show; I'm too old for it. I was too old for the last.'

"'Yes, the wet gets into one's bones at our age,' he answered, 'and we can't do without our sleep. You'd better go back to the horses. I'll send you off as soon as you've got some kit.'

"We had time to spare, and as I lingered, 'You've made a proper old fool of yourself,' he remarked; and, smiling rather grimly with his cold blue eyes, 'you've made rather a fool of me, Mr. Vignolles.' It was a complete and perfect survey of the situation. And next growing

almost human, 'It's the climate,' he ran on; 'most people go a bit daft in hot countries. That's what's the matter with Egypt; all of us out here are a little mad. I've had nearly forty years of it, so I ought to know.' And, dismissing me, as no doubt he had dismissed the *mudir* an hour ago, as he dismissed everybody he didn't want particularly: 'I'll tell Records that you've turned up again; had shell-shock—or was it sunstroke? We'll call it sunstroke. You'll come with me as far as Kantara, and then you'll go to Port Said and collect that hundred pounds you mentioned; we'll square that with the bank for you. Then you can buy a new outfit and come back to the army as a subaltern. You'll report at the Horse Transport Depot; can't have you in camels. And then you'll be sent to Saloniki; they're asking for spare officers.'

"'And there's nothing else, sir?' I don't know why I put the idiotic question, but I suppose I couldn't quite get over the fact that I was to escape without the regulation ceremonial.

"'No, there's nothing else,' the inspector answered. 'You'd only make me look a worse

fool than the last time, would n't you? And, besides, you had n't deserted.' Quite suddenly he had grown entirely kind, entirely human, his blue eyes softening as I looked into their depths. 'You took the fever and the wound,' he ended; and with a finger to his double row of ribbons, 'It 's you fellows I have to thank for most of these.' "

So that was the finish of it, the truth about Vignolles. I only learnt it two years later, after he had turned up in the Park. You will remember? It was a fine May morning and I had seated myself upon a tuppenny chair to watch the world. If any of the old lot chance upon this history, it 's up to them, to all of them, to spread the news.

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

I HAD been telling Vignolles about my stay in Cairo; about the stables and Horse Transport I had taken over at Abu Ella, and how, at the end of a fortnight, after a hard struggle and quinine tablets and a day here and there in bed. I had gone down with malaria, giving up the fight and yielding soul and body to slops and hospital and that accursed arsenic they give you when you 're beginning to come round again, till you feel like a person being slowly poisoned in a shilling shocker. And when I was recovered and convalescent they had sent me home, with all my curiosity about the place unsatisfied.

"I was in Cairo for close on three months," I had ended it, "and I hardly know anything. Might just as well never have been there! That 's the worst of the army and soldiering."

It was a blow. I had read so many of those stories, heavily perfumed, and dark and stealthy,

and full of jewels, great pearls and emeralds, and lovely ladies!

"I know the stuff," said Vignolles, interrupting me. "Most of it 's rot, written by men who 've half-digested 'The Arabian Nights,' or who 've stayed a month at Shepheard's and been round with a guide, and who get an easy living by thrilling lascivious Cockneys with stories of ladies of the *harim* and 'Eastern mystery.' Oh, the 'mysterious East'!" he laughed; "I 'm sick of it! I 've tried it; I 've worked in it and paid my way—you never know a place till you 've done that; and I 've had exactly one adventure I can remember, or is it two? Yes, two. There was a lady of the *harim* and a European lady—she does n't matter so much. She might have happened in England or anywhere else; but the lady of the *harim* was of the country. She made it more clear to me, and I was young enough to learn my lesson."

I had settled down prepared to listen; for Vignolles, once started, was sure to be full and brimming with his subject; and the night was young enough as well. We were cozily aloft, up in my chambers in the Temple, the fire burn-

ing, the curtains drawn, and smoke and refreshment easily to hand.

"Let's hear about the lady of the *harim,*" I had said, "the one I missed." For I'd seen dozens of them, driving about in white and semi-transparent veils, black silk overalls, or whatever they call the costume. They were mostly eyes, those ladies; and some looked exquisite and very much like delicate birds. I had just had time to see them and surrender.

"Yes, they look nice," admitted Vignolles, dubiously. "Most things look nice out in the East," he added; "that's the way of it. But when you pass beyond the looking and begin to understand, most times you're inclined to prefer the plainer West. We don't put everything in the shop-window; not all at once, now do we? But, still, it's their way; and, maybe, under the glaring sun that shows up everything, it's difficult to hold a little back. Give me the Northern mists. They're full of mystery if you like; but out there—" And it was obvious that the East held little that was secret or romantic for my friend Vignolles.

"This isn't a sentimental or a respectable

story," he pursued; "for, to begin with, Egypt and respectability don't seem to agree with one another, and you can't be either—can you?—unless you've a little money to spare and a settled job. I had been to Athens out of curiosity, because I wanted to see, and, for the same reason, I'd worked my passage about the Greek islands in a steam-yacht that carried expensive tourists, and when the summer came, I'd been dumped down at Alexandria. This was in the nineties, when Egypt was beginning to revive. It wasn't the place it's become since; still, it was good enough. I didn't like Alexandria; too European, too Levantine, for my taste. Good spot to make money in or bathe in the sea, but otherwise dull; so I pushed on to Cairo and found a job. It was a very simple one, but enough to keep me going, and the duties were n't too heavy. I became a proof-reader at the Government Printing-Works over in Bulak. They'd got regular men, but one of 'em had been given leave to go home over the summer and they wanted a man to take his place while he was away. I found this out through asking; and when the head man—a very decent fellow out of Yorkshire—had tested me and was satisfied that

I could spell all right and punctuate and do the work, he let me in and the other chap departed.

"It was the hot season, but as you began early and finished at lunch-time, it did n't so mucn matter. I lodged with an English family, Todd by name, and very good-natured people. Of course no Moslem family would take me as a lodger, because of the women, and I did n't fancy Syrians or Levantines, because of the bugs and fleas; so that when somebody told me that the Todds had a spare room, I jumped at it, and there I settled down.

"It was a queer life. Early in the morning I took the tram to the printing-works and did my job in a big cool room away from the machines. It came very easy to me, for I 'd read a lot and the matter was interesting; all kinds of reports about the country, every blessed side of it, from date-palms to irrigation, from water-buffalo to religion; and when the real heat of the day hit you, I was off duty and had nothing to do but doze and perspire under the net that kept the flies off. It was all very nice and cool till one came out into the sunlight after one's morning's work. And then Cairo blazed away at you; the whole city had become an oven; your

strength departed; and you could just manage to crawl on to the tram and crawl off again when it stopped quite close to the door of that hospitable Mrs. Todd. Her husband had a job at the *Tanzim*. It's the department that tries to keep the place clean—rather a business with everybody chewing sugar-cane and eating melon, and throwing what they can't swallow into the street. There were Mrs. Todd and her husband and the two children; but they don't matter much, except that they were very kind.

"When we'd lunched and got into our pajamas and plump little Mrs. Todd into a muslin wrapper, and when I'd slept and sweated in the darkened room with all its shutters closed and had a cold shower and drunk a cup or two of tea, then I'd get my second wind and go out to explore. Cairo was mysterious to me in those days, before I could understand their Arabic and think their thoughts and speak and listen. It was all wonderful and rather fearful. Yes, sometimes it gave me the blue funks. When you're the only white man among crowds and crowds of natives you'll understand what I mean.

"The old Moslem city beyond the Ezbekiah

and ending at the tombs and gates and flowing round the Citadel fascinated and lured me. This world was new to me as it was to you. We lived close by Kasr-el-Nil, all dull and European, and I would get on a tram and hop off at Gamamiz or the junction outside the Mousky, and then I 'd prowl. One walked a few yards and Europe was ended. At first I used a guide-book with a map and found the great mosques. I began with Ibn Tulun, and I 'll never forget it—that vast and surprising courtyard under the fiery blue—the size of it! And you find it so unexpectedly off a tangle of narrow alleys. It 's like the one at Mecca, and, somehow, the first time, I saw it packed with bloody-minded fanatics, listening to the Word and feverish with their hate against the infidel. Really, it was always empty and always dead. No one prays in an old mosque if they can find a new one. And sometimes you found the peace of God there, and sometimes the place and the ghosts you saw in it got on one's nerves. I remember the first time. There were women in a near-by house exorcising a devil, howling and shrieking as though themselves possessed. You could see nothing; you were only aware of that infernal

din; and I seemed back in the dark ages, or as though I had wandered away into some wild corner of the Hebrew Bible; and there was a little Egyptian I had picked up with beside me, apologizing. He was distressed because he thought I might fancy his compatriots were uncivilized. But they are; that's the charm of them to us who try to escape our chains.

"And there was the Sultan Hasan mosque, the perfect mosque; so beautiful that it hit you like a woman loved at sight. Arab art reached its climax here, could go no farther; it has never reached that perfection since, will never touch it or come near it. Coldly, you may realize that the thing is mathematics, an arrangement of lines and curves, and lacking the warm humanism we breathe into our masterpieces. But that great mosque justifies everything; yet, after its finality there is no progress; for Arab art can do no more than that, has said its say. I stood under the dome and gloated; and the same little Egyptian I had picked up with was pleased because I was pleased, and flattered and conciliated.

"The other mosques were mostly repetitions, so when I had seen enough of them I dropped them

out and simply passed away my evenings in the streets; those narrow, unpaved streets, two camels wide, where it never rains and where life is a perpetual procession. I knew most of them between the Citadel and the towers and walls that Saladin built—the whole breadth of the city. I had no money worth mentioning and the bazaars did not greatly tempt me; but these strange, chattering, light-hearted people—these men in gowns, caftans, and colored slippers, with their mysterious affairs which I could never follow; these smiling women with their black garments, their black veils, a metal cylinder on their nose, their bare bosoms, and feet on which shone anklets—they all filled me with a wonder which it took long to outgrow. At the end of many a vista was the gray bulk of Mokattam, those starved and naked hills that always reminded me of a back-curtain in a theater. The light would grow less and less, the dusk would come swiftly; I would be tired from constant looking and wondering and prowling. And then, sometimes, the whole place would become sinister and dark, and I would feel that all those people hated me, the interloper. And that now was their chance. I might

disappear quite easily. In those narrow streets, those haphazard byways, who would find me, who would ever know? I felt sometimes like an animal enmeshed, and was glad to come out whole into Clot Bey or the Mousky; into an open street, with policemen and lighted lamps. Of course it was my imagination. Just as in Ibu Tulun I had filled the great courtyard with a horde of bloody-minded fanatics, so in these darkling streets and alleys I had pictured the antipathy and hatred of the lower for the higher animal. I laughed over it when I came out. I was tired and thirsty; and over our supper the good Mrs. Todd would tell me stories of the country; of lusts, and superstitions, and tales of sudden death. There was, for instance, the story of her Berber servant's wife, who could not conceive unless she had recently been in the presence of a body newly slain. The Berber was sick of this quest and their visits to cemeteries. Such sights disgusted him; but the wife, like all the native women, longed for children. Mrs. Todd, though of English blood, had been born at Smyrna, and she was full of stories of the East.

"The summer went at last and we could

breathe more freely. The great heat was over, and the man whose place I had taken returned from Europe. So now I was out of a job, but I had no difficulty in finding a new one. Indeed, I had my choice. There was a man I had met: his name was Marini, and he was a mixture of all kinds, a true Levantine, though he spoke French better than Greek or Arabic or Italian, and for some unknown reason he had chosen to call himself a British subject. All these mongrels put themselves under the protection of one or another of the foreign consulates, and a British subject he was, in law.

"This Marini was an enterprising chap. He owned a second-rate hotel, a third-rate music-hall, a gambling-house, an Oriental carpet shop, and various other trifles. With the tourist season approaching, he had decided on a further venture. It was before the days of cars and the internal-combustion engine. He proposed to open a first-class livery-stable where the tourists could hire carriages and horses. It was all to be done very smartly—Arab ponies, open coupés, and a bright dress for the drivers. He had bought the coupés in Paris, and he could lay his hand on stables, horse-flesh, and the men.

Would I go into it and be his manager? As most of the tourists were British or American, he wanted some one who could deal with them in their own language. It was to be beyond anything of the kind ever seen in Cairo. He was eloquent and persuasive, a man of imagination.

"I took it on because I was n't tired of Cairo. Not by a long chalks; and after sticking out the summer I wanted to spend the winter and see the city full and at its best. The Todd family agreed with me, but warned me not to trust Marini; so I said that if he paid me each month's wages in advance I 'd take it on. He agreed to that. He was glad to get hold of me, for I understood horses, which he did n't, and now I knew enough Arabic to run a stable-yard of men. We came to an agreement, and he found me an office and furniture and a brass plate and a telephone, then quite new in Cairo; but if we were to be at the disposal of the tourists in the hotels, then the first thing was to put up a telephone. I drew my month's wages in advance, as well; and Marini, once we got going, being fully occupied with his other and ever-increasing enterprises, left me pretty much to do as I pleased.

"He was a curious fellow, restless, never satisfied. In Europe or America he would have become a millionaire or a stupendous bankrupt. He wanted to have a finger in everything, and he felt that if anybody started a scheme in Cairo without his assistance he was being defrauded of his dues. He had a share in somebody's auction rooms; he was in partnership with a man who sold dubious antiquities; he was a member of the Stock Exchange; and he owned a casino on the sea-coast farther north. And at the same time he was always getting into trouble with the wives and daughters of his friends, who blackmailed him unmercifully and followed him and made scenes. That was why he was so often short of ready money, he would explain to me. A curious, unblushing rascal he was, and always very frank about his troubles. He had three wives and families between Cairo and Alexandria, and I said to him that a man of his temperament ought to become a Moslem and have done with it. It would come far cheaper and he'd be perfectly respectable. But he had a queer fear of the social consequences of such a step. He had social ambitions, and one day, when he was rich enough, he said, he'd

clear off to Europe and start over again there, where nobody would know him. He saw himself conquering Paris and London, received at courts, a pillar of high society. With half a million pounds Egyptian it might be done. His wives and children, and so forth, he could abandon; perhaps the one he was married to might die. He would sell out of his various enterprises when they had reached a certain level. As a matter of fact, he came a most awful cropper after the land boom which followed later, and had a stroke and finished his life in a chair. But just now Marini was in high fettle and had given me charge of his newest enterprise.

"I sat in my private office most of the day and answered the telephone and kept the accounts, or, when I was tired of that, I strolled into the yard and jollied up the grooms and washers and coachmen, and kept an eye on the horses and saw that our carriages were turned out spick and span. And I 'd chaff the Arab women who came after the dung which they dried for fuel.

"We made headway, for really and truly we beat the old gharry-drivers hollow, and everybody else, and a coupé from Marini's was almost

as good as a private turnout and often better. The tourists took to us. I fixed that with Cook's and I'd bribed every hotel porter; and even some of the native Egyptians, those lovers of new things, came in and gave us orders, though rather distressed about our charges, and inclined to tumble in ten at a time when we sent round to them.

"It was a peaceful, regular life for me and I seemed settled to it; and soon I got a clerk to do the donkey-work, while I saw Cairo in the winter, when tourists come from Europe and America, when all the government officials are back at their places, the garrison at strength, the Greeks and Dagoes all back from the sea, and the city is gay and cool and full of bustle. And now that I knew some Arabic and could find my way around alone and understood most of what I saw and heard, I used to go to the Egyptian theaters and the concerts where they danced and sang. The audiences amused me. Most often I was the only European in the place, and there was that perfervid audience, wild with ecstasy when Yasmina sang her few lines and her voice drooped and she sang again, barely interrupting the musicians who were playing for

her. They went on, and every now and then, with indescribable languor, she would join in with three or four lovesick verses; and when it had gone on for some little time half the Gyppoes in the hall, young and old, were offering her their hearts, their hands, their treasure, with passionate outcries and gesticulations. She sat quite still and took no notice of them. And then a special attendant would go round, yelling, 'Shut up!' and quieting them, so that the concert could go on again and work up to a new explosion. There was a similar lady in the place near the station, equally plump, equally indifferent, and full of the same languor and voluptuousness. My little Egyptian friend, Fahmy, would sometimes go with me and sit all eyes and ears. And when the declarations began, and old men in dirty *galabiahs* and fat men in caftans and bucks in European clothes howled their undying affection and smote their hearts, and the attendant at last went round yelling, 'Shut up!' and calmed them, he seemed to catch my point of view and laughed with me; but he never seemed to understand that, in my eyes, even the great Yasmina, who sat unveiled, was fat and

ugly and rather ridiculous, with her bleached hair and made-up face and her overpowering jewelry that was mostly heavy chunks of gold.

"I was attracted, and, in a way fascinated by this native life, so close to the ground, so near to savagery and all the primary emotions. It was not the same life that is offered to the tourists, who only see the horrible things that are done to catch Gentile money. It was a different life altogether. I had not fathomed it; perhaps I have never fathomed it; and it needed a spark, some personal touch, to make it start into reality. I was outside it all, and looked likely to remain so. But the touch, the spark, whatever it was, came. It came quite suddenly. You remember there was a telephone on my office wall; a seemingly harmless instrument, devoted to business and miles removed from anything in the nature of adventure, romance, or human passion. I approached it one day. I rang up the exchange and gave the number of our grain merchant. The girl at the exchange—one spoke in French to her—put me through to the wrong number. That had happened before, and it was not the last time. I heard a voice at the other

end and I began in English: 'Mr. Vignolles speaking from Marini's stables, and I want Mr. Coronakis.'

"Instead of the plump Greek with whom I was about to place an order, I heard a ripple of laughter; and next in French: 'You are an Englishman? I should like to speak with an Englishman; but I speak very little English. "'Ow you do," I can say; and "I am very well."'

"I was puzzled at the moment; but soon I tumbled to it. I had been put through to some stranger, evidently a lady, with time on her hands and perhaps of a coquettish turn. The situation amused me, and I dare say I answered in kind. When one is young and not especially busy—but she had gone on with it.

"'You are a tourist?' she next asked.

"'No, I live in Cairo.'

"'*Mashallah!*' she cried. 'That is better.' And next: 'You are in the Government?'

"'No, I govern myself,' I answered.

"She laughed at that. She must have laughed very easily.

"'You are an Englishman and you live in Cairo and you are not in the Government. Ah, you are an officer of the army?'

"'Not even a simple soldier,' I replied.

"She hesitated, and then: 'You are an archæologist; you look for mummies,' she cried, evidently very pleased with herself. '*Tiens!* I have guessed right?' she asked.

"'No, you 've guessed wrong,' I answered, very ungallantly.

"And then an idea struck her.

"'Perhaps you are in business?'

"'Bravo!' I cried.

"She asked me all about it, just as an inquisitive child might do. And I told her of Marini's and the stables and the horses and the carriages and the gay costumes of our Arab drivers and how I passed my time.

"When I had done, 'It is not very *chic*—not very elegant,' she commented. 'But still you are an Englishman, are you not?'

"'Is that elegant?' I asked her.

"'They always speak the truth,' said she; 'do they not? *"Parole d'un Anglais,"*' she quoted. It was all, seemingly, she knew about us; but she was eager to learn more.

"'Will you speak to me every day, Mr. Englishman?' she asked me.

"'Try me,' I answered.

"'Well, to-morrow at four o'clock. What is your number?'

"I gave it to her and she repeated it and repeated it once more to make sure. 'Till to-morrow,' she said. 'At four o'clock. You will be there?'

"'I will.'

"'*Parole d'un Anglais?*' she laughed. 'Say it in English.'

"'On the word of any young man who loves to listen to a beautiful voice,' I said.

"There was no answer. I waited; I listened; I spoke. All was silence. I hung the receiver up on its hook and rang off.

"It was a ridiculous adventure. Everything in Egypt was ridiculous, it sometimes seemed. I did not take the affair very seriously. I tried my luck again with Mr. Coronakis, and this time I found him."

Vignolles paused here, I remember. "It is ridiculous!" he exclaimed. "To think that the chance mistake of a girl in the exchange, to think that an absurd instrument like a telephone could make all the difference!"

"Something has to make all the difference," I answered; "if it is n't the telephone, it 's some

other accident. But go on with it—I am interrupting you. Did she ring up next day at four?"

"But don't you realize what had happened? I had been put through to a *harim;* I had been speaking to one of the guarded ones; to one of the hidden pearls; to one of those delicate ladies who so aroused your admiration, with their white veils and their kohl-darkened eyes. And their little hands and feet, I suppose—you noticed these as well?"

I had noticed them; but instead of replying directly I only whistled.

"So that was the mistake?" I said, reviving. "But how did you know? We have n't come to that yet, have we? Did she keep her appointment?"

"At four o'clock next day she rang me up. It was really four-thirty; but you can't expect these children to be punctual. I was wondering whether she would keep her promise, when the bell tinkled.

"I went to the instrument—they used to hang upon the wall in those days—and it was she all right. That afternoon I found out, more or less, who she was. She did not tell me her name, but she told me that she was a Moslem lady in a

harim; that life was very wearisome; that she had been to Constantinople and that she longed to go to Europe; that she had had a French governess and had studied English; and that she lived in a house near the ministries beyond Bab Ul Luk. She said that she was guarded by her mother-in-law and by eunuchs and that she would like to talk to me whenever she could.

"'Have you a wife?' she asked.

"'Not yet,' said I.

"'Then you have a mistress?'

"'Are you not ashamed?' It made her laugh; and next she asked me where I lived, what Mrs. Todd was like, how much Marini paid me, and any question that popped into her head.

"She was full of questions, and she had a most charming, flute-like voice. Her French was very good, but her English was funny and delightful. She had studied it with a French lady and with books. ''Ow you say "'orse"?' she asked; and it was always ''Ow you say?' when it came to a word that puzzled her. My Arabic was not so very much better, and she laughed at me when I tried it, and she said that she regarded it as a common and vulgar tongue, preferring Turkish. For she was of Turkish origin, like all the

high Egyptian society of those days, which had come out when the country was linked with Constantinople, and her father was a pasha and her husband was a bey. One talked in Arabic with one's servants, she explained.

"'But I am your servant—*Abd-el-Gamila,*' I translated it.

"'Thank you,' she answered; 'but you cannot see if I am beautiful.'

"She was not in love with her husband, she told me, on her third visit. He was always in Cairo, running after *artistes*. These were the European ladies who came in the winter and danced and sang at the variety shows in the modern quarter of the town. She had been given to him when she was seventeen; until her bridal night she had never seen him. He had courted her and won her, as is customary among the educated; and they had been very happy together for a year.

"It was a curious and remote world into which I had stumbled. Almost every day we chatted together, sometimes earlier and sometimes later; and though I had never entered nor was ever likely to enter the *harim* in which she dwelt, I began to know its routine, the detail of her daily

life, and even the aspect of that mysterious house wherein she was hidden. And she—

"'You are an Englishman,' she once asked, 'and so you are tall and fair, with blue eyes and no beard?'

"I told her that I was dark and that neither of my eyes was blue.

"She was disappointed at this, for every race admires its opposite. 'And you are very fat,' I said, 'in your black *habara?*'

"She denied it indignantly and said that she was *petite* and that she only wore her black *habara* out of doors. Indoors, she dressed like a European; and she told me all about her clothes. She liked bright colors, she said, and dresses that were *décolleté*. The dressmakers came to her house, and so did many of the other tradesmen, but sometimes she drove in the European quarter and chose things for herself. She paid visits to other ladies, she read French novels and made embroideries, she often told me what she ate at her meals, and how she had been to the opera and sat in one of those boxes that are screened off so that none may see. Her name, I at last discovered, was Ziba, and her husband was Omar Bey Taher. Perhaps I knew him?

He was always driving about with his French *artiste*, a blonde and stout. One day when she made sweetmeats—she was very clever at making sweetmeats—she would send me some by a reliable messenger, if she could find one. But they never came.

"It may seem absurd, but I began to look forward to these ridiculous conversations. Madame Shervinton, a dear lady who used to keep me in order, had departed; I had few friends; the most of my life was prosaic and abominably dull; but here was the spot of light, and, being young, I pictured her as beautiful and fragile, and I loved the sound of her voice and the curious turns it took as we met in secret and talked, with growing intimacy, along that wire.

"She had a great eagerness to hear about our life in the world outside; yet so much of it was beyond her and impossible for her to follow. Pleasure and every form of indulgence she could understand; but that people had to work to get their living, that the life of the ordinary man or woman was made up of struggle and endurance, she never seemed to grasp. No one in her world had ever done any work that mattered, even in politics, or in the philanthropy that often oc-

cupies our own aristocracy. She was like a flower growing in a garden, a bird singing in a tree; but safe and secluded in her gilded cage, guarded by old women and eunuchs and hidden behind high walls.

"I said one day that I would call and pay her a visit, and at that she took fright and begged me most beseechingly to stay away. No one must ever know that we had spoken together, she insisted. I soothed her and calmed her and said I was only joking, but on the day of her twentieth birthday—she told me of it—I had great difficulty in restraining myself from sending her flowers. But to do that I should have had to make a confidant, and all these people talk or take bribes or spy upon one another. No, it could n't be done, and we had to rest content with congratulations.

"It was on the next day that Omar Bey Taher and his *artiste* came in and ordered a carriage by the month. It was to be regularly at the disposal of the French lady, a showy person, very colored and powdered, very much bejeweled, very emphatic, and decidedly out to exploit her Moslem lover. Taher was a noble-looking creature with velvet eyes; dark, beautifully dressed,

an aristocrat in his own way, and spoilt, thoroughly spoilt, as are all these *harim*-bred Turks of the upper classes. You felt that if he were denied a thing, he would weep till he got it, like a badly brought up child, though he must have been close on forty and was growing rather plump. He settled his business easily and the French lady led him out again. She was to ring for her coupé whenever she wanted it and Taher Bey would settle the bill. That was understood.

"I bowed them out, and though I maintained a professional secrecy, Ziba, in her *harim,* took three days to discover this new transaction; for though all these ladies are locked up and presumably remote from the world, they seem to know more about its intimate happenings than such as run free. She was not the least bit jealous. Taher was nothing much to her now and he could do as he pleased.

"My next meeting with this erring husband occurred a few weeks later. He came in by himself this time. He said that he was very much pleased with the coupé we had provided for Madame; very much pleased. And the costume of our driver was distinguished, and the horses were very good and of a beautiful appearance.

But really, he had not come in to pay me compliments. He arrived at his point at last, and it was that one of his own private horses had gone lame, and another was suffering from sand colic, and the ladies of his household would require a carriage till both animals were recovered. He asked us our terms, therefore, for holding a second carriage at his disposal; and this time, though he had been very grand and indifferent in the presence of the French *artiste,* he haggled and bargained like a man in the bazaars.

"In any case I was determined to oblige him, and he little suspected that I had even been warned of his coming; for Ziba, excited and gay, had already been at the telephone and had told me how the bey, after a visit to his stables, had himself announced that there was a place in the town—Marini's—where a very good carriage could be hired till the need was over. He had suggested this himself and Ziba had looked all innocence. It had been difficult, she said, not to cry out and laugh about it.

"Quite ignorant of the comedy he and I were now enacting, the bey insisted that, as he was hiring a second carriage, the price should be a

low one. I kept up appearances sufficiently to fight him for a quarter of an hour as we sat and smoked over it, and then I yielded and he was very much pleased with his bargain. The ladies, he added, would telephone—he seemed very proud of his telephone—or they would send a servant every morning with their demands. These would not be excessive. They must take the air, they would pay visits, and do their shopping.

"'And you will not ruin the horses by filling the carriage with a dozen people?' I could n't resist fooling him a little further.

"'Only Egyptians do that,' he answered, contemptuously. 'We are Turks, *et très distingués —même très distingués,*' he added.

"I bowed him out and wondered when Ziba would ask for news. She turned up later in the day, after her siesta. She lived like a cat, I had discovered, rising late, sleeping when she felt like it, dressing when she felt like it, often waiting till noon for her bath; something of a slattern indoors, it seemed to me, and spending hours and hours over her toilet. This afternoon she had slept till five, eaten curdled milk—*yah-*

ourt, they call it—and was now at the telephone. I told her about the bey's visit and how he had bargained.

"'Pig!' she cried. 'But now I will see you. I want to see you,' she said. 'We must arrange that. We will arrange that; we cannot forever go on at the telephone.'

"It was she who had proposed it, though it's not for me to play at Adam and say that I was tempted. For I was just as eager, in spite of my laughter and my reservations. I was young, and this secret romance, these trysts and hidden conversations, had eaten their way into my life. Amid the vapor and emptiness of this Eastern capital, indeed, they meant something to me; and to-day I discovered it, as she spoke so wildly. It was the one thing vital in all that life.

"The first time she went driving in one of our coupés it was with her mother-in-law, and they were first going shopping and then they would pay a visit at another *harim* out at Abbassia. She was well satisfied with the carriage I sent her and its pair of well-matched grays, and the flowers I had placed in a bracket. It was *'très chic,'* she said; but perhaps one day she would go alone; for she wanted to see me; to see me

with her own eyes. She was not particularly backward. They never are, these Eastern women; for love is their business, the business of their lives.

"A second day she went driving, again with that accursed mother-in-law, this time 'to smell the air,' as they call it. They had gone for a couple of hours on the road that leads to the Pyramids and come back through the dusk of the evening. They had seen green birds in the fields and had watched the sunset and the waters that still stood where the Nile had been in flood. It had all been very beautiful; but she had wanted to see *me;* and again she thanked me for the flowers that were in the carriage. The old woman had taken these and placed them in a jar of water. Now Ziba had come in and she had changed her outdoor things and put on a new dress of palest yellow silk. She wished I could see her in it. It was cut low and she wore no corsets. It was only old women or fat women who needed corsets, or the mothers of many children; but she was young. Soon I would see how young she was. Her mother-in-law was going on a visit to Alexandria and then it might be contrived.

"'I shall be in the carriage alone,' she said two days after this; 'perhaps we can at least see one another, though we shall not be able to speak.'

"I was again at the telephone and she at the other end. They had had a carriage in the morning to take the old lady to the station and had asked that it should be sent back at five o'clock that afternoon. Now it was three and in the cool and pleasant month of February.

"'I will drive you, myself,' I said, on the spur of the moment.

"'But you,' she answered; 'you who are a gentleman!'

"'I would do more than that to set eyes on you.'

"'I thank you,' she said. 'There will be Hamouda, the eunuch; he will spy on us.'

"'I will be discreet.'

"About four o'clock that afternoon, appropriately dressed, I went down to the yard. Abdul, our head man, looked at me inquisitively. He was one of those pious Moslems that pray and prostrate themselves, wherever they may happen to be, and who divide themselves punctiliously between their wives. He had one up near the Citadel and another at Bulak, and each evening

he went home in turn to her whose day it was. He wondered what I was doing in a native livery.

"'I will take the next carriage out,' I said.

"'But that one is going to Taher Bey,' he answered, 'to a *harim.*'

"'I wish to try the two chestnuts. You will put them in.'

"'But there will be Moslem ladies in the carriage.'

"'That does not matter.'

"'There is a Frankish lady who is going out a little later,' he persisted.

"'It is the horses I wish to drive, and not the ladies,' I cut him short.

"He went off muttering, but did as he was told.

"I drove the coupé round to the old gray palace behind Bab Ul Luk. I had placed a box of Groppi's best chocolates on the little seat, and flowers as usual. I had seen the house before, by sunlight and by moonlight; with its porters and eunuchs at the gates; its *selamlik* on one side, the lodge where Taher Bey received the gentlemen of his acquaintance; and the *harim,* where no one entered but women or the men of the family, filling up the background. There

were high gray walls enclosing a garden, but no one could enter here except at risk to Ziba and himself; for the law of these people was their own law, in spite of the courts and the British officials who ruled outside.

"I drove up and waited, and one of the two eunuchs went in and announced me, and presently the door of the *harim* opened and Ziba herself came down the steps and into the little front garden that was railed off from the street. It was my first glimpse of her and hers of me, although we had known one another since the autumn. She wore the white veil that goes over the ears and which meets the black dress or *habara,* but she had chosen one so transparent that I could catch the outline of her face below the eyes and brow, and even the curves and color of her small red mouth. A little aquiline her nose was, but only a suggestion. And she was slim and of middle height and very delicate about the hands and feet. Exquisitely gloved and shod she was, and exquisitely clean and neat all over, as these women always are when they come of a good family. She stepped through the gate and stood on the curb below me, and, speaking in Arabic before the servants, she said

very slowly and rather shyly, 'You will drive along the road that leads to the Pyramids. I wish to smell the air.' And all the time she was looking into my face and searching, as much as to say, 'So this is he?'

"The eunuch, Hamouda, gave her his hand; she lifted one little foot and then another. Hamouda then climbed beside me on the box, a tall, lean, bony Nubian, with tarboosh and frock coat, elastic-side boots, and a big gold watch-chain. I felt like throwing him overboard and driving away with Ziba. But that was not feasible, and I gave the word to my two ponies, and off we went to 'smell the air' along the Pyramids road.

"Other carriages passed us. In some I had acquaintances; but no one recognized me, for it never occurred to them to look at the coachman, but always at the occupant. Even Taher and his French *artiste* went by without a sign; but they were too much bent on seeing and being seen by the European world and could not condescend to a mere Moslem lady in a coupé.

"Once or twice I looked round, and Ziba was nibbling my chocolates; and 'Wait a little,' she said later; 'we will give the horses a rest.'

Hamouda, the eunuch, sat impassive, his long legs hunched up, his hairless face turning neither to the right nor to the left. Several times, in his high, piping voice, he spoke to me, asking me the name of my town, how long I had been in Cairo, and why their usual coachman was not on duty. He was sick, I explained. I did not encourage Hamouda. I wore the same dress as our other men; I was tanned and dark; but the character of my face is not Egyptian, is it?"

"Hardly," I agreed with him. "No, it certainly is n't Egyptian."

He continued:

"Ziba's eyes had been in the small of my back throughout that drive as she sat munching the chocolates or putting one of the roses to her veil; and I had seen little enough of her, except in the few times when I had turned to take her orders. Always she spoke in Arabic, but when we came again to the Taher palace and it was time to separate, disregarding the ungainly Hamouda, she stepped out of the carriage, and, stopping for a moment as though to look at my ponies, she turned her bright eyes full on me, and finding her words in English, 'You are all sweetness,' she said; and 'You are like pearls

and rubies,' I answered. Then, '*Aiwa, ya sitt,*' I added; for the servants were listening. She turned, my flowers in her hand, and went into the house. But after all those weeks we had set eyes on one another at last, and each of us was pleased with the discovery."

Vignolles had paused here, to dwell for a moment on that far-off recollection. He refilled his glass, he lit another cigar and watched the smoke dissolve as it rose between us.

I waited for him, and I could well picture the Vignolles of those days; not yet thirty, tall and dark and slender, a handsome fellow, if ever there was one; and not a bit spoilt, and easy, and a trifle thoughtful. He had lived; even then he had seen much of the world and known its difficulties and disillusions; but, as he himself had said, he was young, and he had always been possessed by an urging spirit of adventure. Such, then, was the man who had captivated this lovely Moslem woman. I could see her too, with her exquisite grace, her eagerness, and entire remoteness from our Western world where women run free; a creature, sheltered, ignorant, and yet delightful, with a depth, maybe, an intensity, in those few matters that she could call her own.

A simple directness, perhaps, a certain savagery. I don't know how I came to these conclusions, but there she stood.

"And that was all?" I prompted him.

"Not by any means," he replied. "That was only the beginning. She was at the telephone next morning. She had not slept all night; and when she heard my voice, 'I love you,' she said; 'do you love me?'

"I answered her quite honestly. But it all looked hopeless. There were the eunuchs; there was that guarded house; it seemed impossible to meet her. But there was a way. 'I have a friend—a Christian friend,' she added, 'Madame Sangrano. She is Italian and a widow. She lives at a little house in Zeitoun. She gives me music lessons when I am not too lazy. I will send to her, and then you must find her house and I can meet you there. I will send to her to-day.'

"I went to Zeitoun the very next evening. It is a suburb of Cairo, a place full of little villas set in gardens; and there I found the villa of Madame Sangrano, a dark and rather oily Maltese woman of about forty, who lived with a Syrian servant girl, a wild gipsy-like creature,

without shoes or stockings, and all of whose clothing looked like coming to pieces.

"Madame Sangrano was expecting me. We sat in her little garden, with its gourds and purple bougainvillea, and its shrubs and mosquitoes, and its runnels of water, and the first star in the sky. 'You will come alone,' she arranged it, 'and Madame Taher will follow. She may as well make me a visit as anybody else, and she can say she has come to see me about her music. You will pay me one pound Egyptian. It is very little.'

"All that was agreed. I would have agreed to anything. Two days later Ziba rang me up and told me that at six o'clock in the evening she would be at Zeitoun. I closed my office early and took the train. She came by road and in one of our carriages.

"I was drinking my first cup of tea with the stout Maltese who called herself an Italian when Ziba was announced and the Syrian servant girl showed her in to us. Outside stood the coupé with its two Arabs, and Hamouda, the black eunuch, seated on the box. One could see them through the window. They had their orders to come back in an hour. At last Madame San-

grano withdrew and left us to ourselves. It was only then that Ziba removed her veil, the white *yashmak* that was fastened to her ears, and let me see her face and the firm, full neck, and the blue veins that marked the whiteness of the transparent skin below. I have never known a woman more beautiful, more tender, more complete. She was nothing but woman, and mine—mine so utterly as she quivered in the arms that held her close. She was risking her life to be with me. Can any woman do more? I loosened the hood that covered her head, I took the black *habara* from her shoulders and drew her clear of it. She was in a dress of thinnest gauze now, flowered with silver. She had smooth hair like silk, of a pale brown, and small, pink feet, the color of rosebuds. Time fled with her, and when the carriage had waited a second hour, she tore herself away, and I was left alone with Madame Sangrano and the Syrian maidservant. Romantic creatures, both. I could have bashed their heads together! And next morning early I was back at the office, rubbing my eyes and wondering whether it all had been a dream. But it was no dream; for soon she was cooing softly in the telephone. I wonder whether anybody

heard us at the exchange. We were mad; utterly and gloriously mad, the two of us, that morning twenty-something years ago.

"A curious double life began for us. Outwardly we lived in our respective worlds; I with my horses and stables and Gyppo drivers, and Marini coming in to collect the money and flatter me for the great success I had made of it; and she secluded in her *harim* beyond Bab Ul Luk. But once or twice a week we could steal off and meet in secret at the Maltese woman's villa. Those hours were the realities of our two lives; the rest, illusion and a dream. Sometimes we looked ahead, trying to arrive at a future; but, in truth, we were two children caught up in a net. We made plans to escape it.

"The mother-in-law had come back from her visit to Alexandria; Taher's own horses were recovered and a second coupé was no longer required. Our meetings became more difficult.

"'I will pay a Greek to stab my husband,' Ziba once proposed; 'and then you can take me to England.'

"I too thought of an elopement; and I could hardly have been quite mad when I faced the

question of flight with her; for I could never see her and think of her as living amid the cold and wet of the sunless North. And one day I said to her, 'You would be unhappy with me there; only a rich man could take you to Europe and give you the life to which you are accustomed.' She was so helpless and so remote from our material struggles and our strange society of women who are much like men and move quite freely in the world. And of money she knew nothing: she had always had her swarm of servants, her horses, her carriages; all her luxurious wants had been fulfilled. At the thought of her managing a poor man's house in England, the slave to duties and the harsher life we others lead—it was impossible. Ziba was made for loving and being loved; to charm, to fascinate, to touch the senses. That had been her education, the end to which she and all of her kind had been directed. 'If I had ten thousand a year,' I said at last, 'we might be happy, even in Europe.' *'Malish,'* she said, nestling closer to me; 'it does not matter.'

"One thing I remember very forcibly about her was her strange ignorance of all that concerned her own people, and even of the very

city she dwelt in and where she had spent her life. I spoke to her of the great mosques, of my previous prowlings and explorations. She had seen nothing of this side of the town, knew nothing of its history or of its monuments. 'But the Sultan Hasan mosque is like you,' I said. 'It is perfect; so beautiful that I uttered a cry when I found it.' And, in truth, there was between them a certain resemblance. All that flesh and blood could give, she could give. The perfection of line and curve that had so awed me in that masterpiece was hers; and it had never known the sadness, the suffering, which pierces with mystery and so transfigures our Western shrines.

"March came and then April and the beginning of the hot weather. The French *artiste* departed, after a highly successful season, and Taher Bey was left alone. He played cards most of the night in his club or in his *selamlik;* and though a Turk and so proud of it, he began to dabble in Egyptian politics. With us he did not interfere. But once or twice we had been careless, and there were always those eyes on us; the eyes of servants, the eyes of all that silent throng who live by the will and desires of

their master. There is no mystery in the East, with all those people watching; and to me, the interloper, they would be more than hostile. There was Abdul, our head man, religious and fanatical. Sometimes I wondered what he knew, as his eyes followed me those afternoons when I escaped; and, perhaps, Hamouda, the eunuch, too, had his suspicions. Twice I had been delayed, arriving late at Madame Sangrano's villa, and had passed the carriage as it waited.

"One day Ziba rang me up and I went to the telephone. 'I fear; I fear everything!' she cried. 'Taher has been told. You must pay a Greek to kill him; but quick!' Some one must have interrupted her; for that was all. And after it there fell a silence. I waited and I waited; day after day went by; I heard no more. And the great heat came and the sand-storms that mark the turning of the year. The tourists had all departed; Cairo was emptying. Ziba would have sent me word had she too gone.

"I called on Madame Sangrano. She could gain admission to the house and find out what had happened. I begged her to do so. She promised and named her price. She was a rare old bloodsucker; and I lingered for a space in

her low, squat villa, with the two rooms she had left clear for us all haunted by the presence of the woman who now seemed lost. It hurt me to be there; it hurt me to be idle. Madame Sangrano promised to call on me in a few days and give me news.

"When she came I was alone, and she sat down in the chair in my office reserved for customers.

" 'I have bad news,' she began.

"I knew that; I had a premonition.

" 'Taher Bey has found us out and Madame Taher is gone. They say she has been poisoned; but who will ever know? I have it from a woman of her household. That is all I can tell you. It is dangerous to meddle with these Moslem women, most dangerous. Hamouda, the eunuch, must have spied on us. It has cost me money to discover so much. But there are other ladies in Cairo—Europeans—I have a little friend—'

" 'Here is your money,' I interrupted her. She bade me *au revoir* and I was left alone. What she had said was doubtless true. The walls that surrounded Ziba had closed on her. Within that dim and secret palace where no law ran but the will of Taher Bey, who knew what end had

come to her? And, to-day, her white body, torn by poison, lay buried in the sands in that city of the dead which lies between the ancient town and the Mokattam; or, swollen and hideous, with weights at its feet, lay rotting in the Nile. It was my fault. No, it was not my fault; it was the fault of youth and beauty and the joy one finds in love and loving. They had killed her. It was their barbarous way. Taher, with his French *artiste,* had followed the law of his tribe. I wished in that moment I had found the resolution to pay a Greek to stick a knife in him. But we don't do these things.

"A day or two later Taher himself came in and paid his bills, the two bills he had run up with us. He said nothing personal, but there was a snake-like glitter in his eyes; and next he ordered carriages for the friends of a new bride. He was getting married. If I cared to assist at a Moslem wedding, he said, I might come to his house. Many Europeans liked to see such things. I thanked him, and neither of us turned a hair. He took himself off at last. I had not the strength to bargain with him when we made our price.

"I did not go to that wedding, nor to any other

thing; for, overnight, the whole of the East had become hateful to me; the endless sunshine, the unyielding heat, the gibbering, futile natives in their dirty *galabiahs,* or their European clothes with tarbooshes the color of blood. These seemed a symbol. And the streets seemed full of that fanatic horde whose ghostly presence I had felt in the great square of Ibn Tulun, or on those close evenings when I had wandered in the narrow streets and byways and had been overtaken by the fears that leapt out with the darkness. The whole place was repellent, hostile, and disgusting. What was I doing here, I asked myself—a white man amid these swarms of browns and blacks? I had a sudden longing for my own people; for the cold and rain of the North; for hills and trees and a real country instead of these made and irrigated fields and the waste of the desert; for the mists and grayness and the quiet faces that really are mysterious. I hated that pitiless sunlight. How I hated it!

"Marini offered no objection. The season was over, and in the autumn, if I liked, the job would be open for me. He was not a bad kind of fellow. I had made money for him and he gave me

presents; one of his best carpets and a gold watch with a Turkish dial. I sold it in Chicago the next winter."

Vignolles had paused, and I fancied that that was the end.

"A tragic story," I said, rising. I threw some coal upon the fire, and, while I stooped, "Youth is tragic," he responded; "and in a hot country it's more tragic than in a cold one. One's nerves race there; but, curiously enough, this was not quite the finish to it."

I had gone back to my seat, and he smiled now as he looked up at me.

"I was in Alexandria," he resumed, "and it was many years later, and I was no longer the young man that I had been when I was there before. I had some business with a native lawyer, Sami Bey by name, and he took me to see a Moslem widow of his acquaintance, a Madame Farid. 'She is an old friend of yours; I manage her property,' he had said. 'When I spoke of you to her, she said she had known you. That is very extraordinary. A handsome woman—a very handsome woman!' he had concluded.

"The next day he took me to the house. It was one of those stucco villas outside the town

that overlook the Mediterranean; a large, untidy place, full of servants and children; and there I found Ziba, doubly a widow, and presumably very comfortably situated.

"I was surprised. I was much more than surprised.

"'No, he did not kill me,' she answered. 'Madame Sangrano must have lied to you. He could have done it and nobody would have questioned. Instead, he sent me off to one of his estates. It was hot there and very lonely. He married a second wife, a rich woman, but ugly; and then he came back to me, divorcing the other, and we had four children. It was because I had been unfaithful to him that he wanted me. Taher was like that. Only when another valued what he had, did he too value it. Now he is dead—both of them are dead—and I am no longer young, nor am I beautiful.' She said it slowly, languidly, with her rich voice, and her French was not so perfect as it had been. Her veil had fallen to one side, her dress was open at the neck, her hands were heavy with jewels and her cheeks were too much powdered. She had grown stout, and rather shapeless. Where had I seen her like before? Irresistibly she re-

minded me of some one. I had it! In spite of her greater dignity, her nobler air, it was Yasmina. It was the singer I had listened to long ago in Cairo who had sent her Egyptian audience into ecstasies.

"'And you are married?' she now asked.

"'Yes,' I answered, on the spur of the moment; 'I am married and have five children.'

"It was a lie; but, upon my word, I feared her.

"'*Malish;* it does n't matter,' she said, in her slow, languorous way. 'As things are I am well contented. But if Taher had been like my father and my grandfather,' she added, with some of her old fire, 'he would have killed me. And you—you would have killed Taher!'

"There was no answer to that.

"And then: 'Time is not kind to us women in the East. It is well,' she ended.

"She gave me one of her plump hands to kiss before I left. It was all that remained of her beauty. But Sami Bey, who had come in again and was now standing by, held obviously to a different opinion. He glowed with honest admiration as he stood, like some small spider spellbound by its formidable mate, and just as those others had glowed before Yasmina."

Vignolles was done. "So now you know a little about the 'mysterious East,'" he chaffed me, laughing; "and perhaps it 's just as well you came out of it!"

AN HONEST LIVING

AN HONEST LIVING

THE earning of an honest living is a problem which most of us have to face and very often to endure, and my friend Vignolles, who for thirty adventurous years had beat the world in search of knowledge, had ever been handicapped by this irksome but inescapable necessity. It had led him into strange places and strange callings; and though he had frequently enjoyed the former, especially when looking back on them, he was not so sure about the rest. He had put up with the one for the sake of the other on occasion. "But a man who 's single and not too old can always earn his keep anywhere." He had arrived at this conclusion, and, early in life, had adopted it as a kind of personal motto. It was his scroll, his challenge, and had he possessed a shield and coat of arms, these words would have been blazoned and proclaimed thereon.

"If a man's single and not too old." He re-

peated the phrase this evening; and then he added as an afterthought: "I 'd always taken that for granted till I ran into Saloniki. It beat me. Saloniki is the exception that proves the rule, and it 's the capital of Macedonia. It 's burnt down and rather off the map at present; but did I ever tell you how I tried it in the long ago before the war?" he continued. "Before the two wars, strictly speaking; before the rest of Europe had discovered it; when the Turk was its lord and master and wild men roamed the wilderness outside its ancient walls. Macedonia!" he exclaimed. "What a place! what an area of damnation! the last place God made!"

Vignolles had barely mentioned that country until this evening. I knew he had served there, gaining promotion and a decoration; but that had nothing to do with earning an honest living.

We had dined together, he with me, or I with him—I forget which of the two had paid the reckoning—and now we had left the crowded restaurant and gone back to my chambers in the Temple, where one could talk and smoke and draw a low chair to the fire. The sitting-room is a cozy spot; as cozy as any in London, though

those wretched trams on the Embankment clang and clatter in the hot summer nights.

And now we will go back to Saloniki.

"I had come round from Trieste," Vignolles had answered me; for, of course, I had shown an interest, a curiosity. "On an Austrian boat," he next pursued, "a very good one, clean and speedy. She was going to Constantinople, and on our way we were looking in at Saloniki. It used to be a fairly busy place before the Greeks got hold of it, shoved on a murderous tariff, and spoilt it. Most of the Balkan trade went through the port and there was very little duty to pay when things came in; so half of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, and even Rumania, found an outlet or bought there. But it was no place for a European or any one unaccustomed to the Eastern way of doing business. Everybody lied like an artist and accepted bribes, backsheesh, and odd commissions, from the governor up at the *Konak* to the porters on the quays.

"We had n't meant to do more than call there, but something went wrong with the ship's engines and held us up for a week, or rather more

than a week. We were told that we could proceed by rail if we liked, at the company's expense, or, if we chose to stay, we would be accommodated the same as usual. My boss—I had a boss just then—we 'd picked one another up at Trieste—was for taking the rail. He was in the tobacco trade, an American, and rather a large buyer. His name was Bruce and this was his first business trip to Europe. One of the other partners had always come before, but Bruce had thought he 'd like the trip, and nobody had objected. He could n't speak any language but English. This is where I came in. We 'd met at a hotel; he 'd remarked the ease and vigor wherewith I made myself at home there, and he guessed I 'd be pretty much the same in Constantinople. 'More so,' said I; for I knew Constant far better than I knew Trieste. He thought for a moment, and then he made me an offer. It was rather a good offer. Would I come along with him and help him out? We 'd buy tobacco and see the sights. It 'd be a business trip, but there 'd be a good deal of fun thrown in. He was in no hurry. Bruce was a Southerner and very far from being a hustler. He did n't believe in hustle. If you knew what

you wanted, there was no need. And the people out there were expecting him; he had the right addresses to go to; would I keep him company and help him out with the talking?

"We 'd got on famously so far; and now it was a question of taking the train, or waiting till the ship had mended her engines. We had decided on the train, but Bruce had proposed a day or two ashore first; so we 'd packed a hand-bag and put up for the night at a hotel. He had his camera with him; he had a wish to see Saloniki—or any other outlandish place, for that matter—and there might be something doing in tobacco.

"Saloniki was pretty soon explored. The place looked very nice from the sea, with its white minarets, the dome of St. Sophia, and its castle, towers, and battlemented walls. It tumbled down a hill—a narrow city—and then spread out, crescent-shaped, for a mile or two where it reached the water's edge. It looked Eastern and picturesque and full of color; but when we got ashore it was an unholy spot full of mud and smells and atrocious paving that made your feet sore, and there was nothing much in the way of sights or curiosities to mend them.

"The inhabitants were just as bad, all shriveled by malaria and out to make money by selling and re-selling and tre-selling, or buying and re-buying and tre-buying. At least, that's what most of them looked like. A parasitic breed! There was n't a factory chimney in the place, and of all the stuff they bought and sold, nobody had made any or hewn any or grown any or done more than buy or sell it. We both concluded that Saloniki lived on its wits or by lending money; and that the Turk took a commission on it all and regarded everybody else as a heathen and fair game. And as to buying any tobacco here—we felt we'd wait till we got among Bruce's friends in Constant.

"He and I had been marked men from the moment we landed. The proprietor of the hotel, the head waiter, and all sorts of obliging and beady-eyed gentlemen had asked us what we wanted, leading up to it very cleverly and cunningly, but always arriving there sooner or later, and if they could do anything to help us, of course that would afford them a pleasure so exquisite— But I dare say you have met that kind of small talk. It was like a money-lender's circular, only more so.

"Bruce was rather humorous when the situation dawned upon him. He could n't understand a word, but I did my best to make the position clear. 'The notion is that we 've come to buy something,' I said. And after that we had rather a lark with everybody who was out to scalp us. First of all we made them show us the mosques. The good ones were Greek churches that had been converted. Very fine and Byzantine, a couple of them were, and difficult to discover without a guide. Well, we had our pick of a dozen guides. And after that Bruce got out his camera and took snapshots of everything and everybody, to the great annoyance of the Moslem population, whose code forbids the making of pictures, and to the great delight of a couple of young gentlemen, all hair-oil and wild jewelry, in fancy waistcoats, tropical neckties, and shiny little boots which had got rather soiled as we dragged their owners uphill through the mud.

"We dined at the hotel, and as we sat there Bruce had another and more simple inspiration. He had already disclosed the fact that he was a professional photographer, a dealer in picture post-cards, and the representative of "Collier's

Weekly," "Harper's" and "The Illustrated News" and "Graphic."

"'Tell the Dago we 've come ashore to buy an elephant,' he said; and it was a remark that won us instant respect and consideration; for, translated and understood, it merely became a polite way of asking an officious person to mind his own business. 'That gentleman seems to know the East very well,' was a reluctant tribute paid by one of the Levantines to whom I had interpreted Bruce's improvisation. And when I passed the compliment on to its rightful owner, he was amused and thought of other and rarer explanations of our saunterings through these crowded narrow streets and the bazaars that were guarded by a wooden roof from the fierce sun of the hot season.

"Next day we took a gharry and tried the open moors beyond the city walls, but had only gone a little distance when our driver halted, and, speaking in the Spanish jargon of the place, a curious lingo imported by the Jewish exiles of the Inquisition, 'No farther,' he said; 'it is dangerous; there are brigands.'

"I remembered then that I had read in the newspapers of a foreigner or two who had been

captured here and held to ransom; and, 'Gee, what a place!' said Bruce, when I had explained matters. 'A town full of Shylocks and a country full of robbers! The last place God made!' was how he ended.

"Still, in the brilliant sunshine, with a glimpse of the blue sea and the mountains across the gulf and the fine, clear air, it was n't so bad, and I knew that in midwinter, as we stood, there were many people at home who would gladly have exchanged with us. The driver gave us time to admire the view and then turned round and back into the city.

"At the hotel, after another hour's tramping of those infernal paving-stones and the mud that lay between them, we sat down to luncheon within ear-shot of a dozen interested listeners, who were still trying to fathom the meaning of our presence and to turn it into a commission or a profit. The simple explanation that we were passengers from the *Medusa,* stuck in the port with damaged engines, must have occurred to some, but how could they be sure? And even then our destination and our business might lie with Saloniki. There was no shaking them off till they had made certain. One must admire

such persistence, such tenacity, so fierce an egotism; but Bruce, I am afraid, was beginning to resent it; and, moreover, he had sat down with aching feet, with nerves on edge, and very hungry. Under his guidance I was downright rude to some people. They took it calmly, and as though they were used to it.

"After luncheon he felt better; but it was after luncheon on that second day, when the impression produced by the place had soaked in and been more or less digested, that Bruce declared it was a sheer impossibility for any white man to earn his living here or hereabouts. Don't forget the hereabouts; for I never shall," added Vignolles; and he sat up now and chuckled at a distant recollection that at one time, I fancied, could hardly have been so humorous.

"I 'm inclined to agree with Bruce," I said.

"So am I," he answered; and then continuing: "It was after Bruce had issued this challenge that I came out with my old axiom, 'Any man who is single and not too old can always earn his keep anywhere if he wants to.' I said it stoutly; for I had rather relied on it, built up a whole philosophy about it, and tested it, time and time again.

"'I 'm not speaking of his keep; I 'm speaking of a living,' said Bruce.

"'Comes to the same thing,' said I.

"'Well, we may stick here a week—we can if we want to—and I 'll bet you can't support yourself and turn up smiling at the end of it.'

"'I bet I can,' said I.

"'If I thought you 'd win—' he began; meaning, of course, that he was n't taking the risk of staying in this infernal hole more than a very little longer.

"'Oh, I 'll win right enough.'

"That seemed to nettle him. These Americans from the Southern States are a bit touchy.

"'Well, we 've nothing much else to do, and I 'm in no hurry,' he drawled; 'I 'll go back to the ship and leave you here. An honest living, mind you,' he added. 'Of course, anybody could follow one of these little Dagoes into a back street and frighten his money out of him.'

"'A perfectly honest living,' I said.

"'Well, I 'll bet you can't; and I 'll give you odds, twenty to two in Turkish pounds. Will that do?'

"'Done,' said I; 'and I don't want your odds'; for I was just about as roused as he was. It

had always been an article of faith with me and one I had often needed to keep me going—well, I won't repeat it—but I was n't going to give it up on his account. There and then Bruce and I totaled up the money I had on me and made a note of it. There were my watch and chain and ring—

"'You 'll have to produce these and all your clothes,' he said; 'and you won't starve, anyway,' he grinned; 'I 've never seen such a collection of ole-clo' men and pawnbrokers as have got themselves together in this ancient and historic city. To-day 's Tuesday. I 'll meet you here next Tuesday at one o'clock, unless you come aboard and say you 've lost, which you will do. So long, Vignolles, see you to-morrow'; and with that last piece of brazen effrontery he took his leave of me and went out at the main door and into the hotel vestibule.

"The Olympus Palace Hotel—that was the pretentious name of it—faced the sea and Mount Olympus across the gulf on the one side and a little square on the other; and, as I said before or did n't say, it was a warm and sunny afternoon in early January, the sort to make a Londoner's mouth water. There was snow on the

far mountains, Ossa, Pelion, and Olympus where the Gods used to live; and I wondered what sport they were going to have with me!

"I went upstairs, to begin with, and sat on a balcony and pondered over the difficulties of the situation, smoked a cigarette, and enjoyed the view. It is one of the most beautiful I have ever seen, with those far, snow-covered mountains floating like clouds in a blue sky. You half expect them to move and sail toward you. And there were little boats from all the islands of the Ægean, coming in or going out or moored in rows against the Marina—so they called the waterfront—with red-brown sails, or piled full of oranges, a blaze of color; or it might be melons later on or purple aubergines. Just then it was oranges.

"That did n't help me much. So I went out into the town, then uphill to the Turkish quarter, and back. Boys were shouting the local newspapers. 'El Avenir!' they yelled. It 's good Spanish and means 'The Future.' But the wretched thing was printed in Hebrew, so I could n't even read it. There were Turkish papers and Greek papers; and these were no good. But at last I came across two in French

and turned to the advertisements. Always study the press, is my motto, if you come to a new place and want to get right inside of it.

"I got inside of it, and, as I had feared, it was nothing but export and import; and clerks were required who knew Greek, Bulgarian, and Turkish, and there were demands for book-keepers and shorthand writers and typists. Not much use to me. Nobody wanted anything done in English, Russian, French, or Arabic, or any of the languages I was used to. And as for the country-side beyond the town, these newspapers ignored it. The porters on the quays and the boatmen in the harbor were closed corporations and would not welcome an outsider; and nobody seemed to have horses to ride or drive or a garden or farm that wanted labor. I would n't have been particular; it was only for a week. If the worst came to the worst, I 'd get a barrow, fill it up with oranges, and cry them through the town. I did n't know that there 'd be a 'living' in it; but at any rate it would be 'honest.'

"I went back to the Olympus and dined, a marked man, as before; yet I knew that if I asked for anything my credit would go down to zero. I might have got a dog's job at half

the current wages; I knew that just as these people cringed before the strong, they would exploit and despise a supplicant. They could come to me if they wanted anything. I talked to one or two of them and gave very little away and got less than a little in exchange. If I played poker or bridge, they were ready to oblige me, or if I cared to invest money or to procure investment from abroad. As a man and a brother I did not exist, and scarcely as a human being; but could I have proved myself a Greek, a Hebrew, an Armenian or a Deunmeh, perhaps I might have found a different welcome. A Deunmeh, by the way, is a Mahometan Jew, descended from converts or pseudo-converts.

"Were there any resident English in the place? I put the question to a couple of these men and was told that, besides the consul, there was a missionary who sold cheap Bibles which one could resell at a good profit, and that they were printed in all the languages. But as Bruce had stipulated for an 'honest living,' I let the missionary go. The lady in charge of the Roman Catholic convent was an Englishwoman, and the representative of the Standard Oil Company was either an Englishman or an American. They

were not sure which it was; his name was Smith; and, *'Mon Dieu,* what a business!' one of them began; and next they fell to arguing whether John D. Rockefeller had more money than Rothschild or whether it was the other way round. I could not enlighten them, so took my departure with the question still unsettled.

"In the little square round the corner of the hotel I was accosted by another stranger, and to my relief I saw that he was badly dressed, a ruffian, one-eyed, and with a three-days' beard. He spoke in Greek, but changed into the local Spanish when he found that I had none of it. He was a large man, villainous, ugly, and yet not very dangerous. A bully and a blusterer, perhaps, but not at all dangerous. So I had sized him up by the time he was finished. He had offered to serve as my guide to the pleasures of the place. 'Is there anything else?' I asked him. He scratched his head and repeated his previous invitations, and when I turned to go, *'Café-concert,'* he said; 'there is the Odéon.'

"We were standing under a big electric globe that lit the tiny square, and there were bright lights flooding out from all the open cafés. I could see him quite plainly as he stood there,

disreputable, brutal, yet somehow abject—a pariah dog of a man, in spite of his great bulk.

" 'Take me to the Odéon,' I said, and away he shambled.

"I followed him. Apparently he did not expect me to walk at his side or to be very proud of his company. He gave me the option at least, and if I cared to be seen with him it was my business. As a matter of fact, I found him rather refreshing after the other rascals we had been dealing with. He, at least, was open and made no pretensions to appearances, to respectability, to anything beyond the facts of his atrocious trade.

"We walked along the Marina till we came to the Odéon. It is easily the worst variety show in this or any other continent. I have heard of it since, alive with Allied officers. It had not changed, only the audience. My new friend followed me into the box I had taken. I had invited him in and sat now in full view of the company. I even ordered him to a front seat, so that he could better watch the singers and the dancers. He really enjoyed it. He was very easily satisfied, and criticism is only a matter of comparisons. A month in Paris might have

destroyed this ingenuousness. But here we were, in Saloniki.

"When a singer or a dancer had finished her turn, she mingled with the audience, and the really serious business of the evening was before her. She had to persuade these people to spend their money with the place, and on what they spent she made her small commission. She would begin by asking for champagne and compromise on sparkling cider, or even have to content herself with a mug of beer. As we watched these proceedings, some one tapped at the door of our box and a gentleman in a fez entered.

"'You permit me?' he began, speaking in French; and 'Permit you what?' I answered in the same noble language.

"'I desire to have a word with—with this animal. I will not detain you a moment.'

"'By all means,' said I, and offered him a chair.

"The newcomer was a Turk, apparently, for under his fez he had an authoritative Moslem face, weakened rather than strengthened by what an optimist might call our 'Western culture.' The worst sides of it would lie open to him in

any of our big cities, to be toyed with and flung aside. He was arguing earnestly and with his hands and feet, so to speak; and the only answer he got for his pains, it seemed, was a stubborn negative.

"'No,' said my companion; and 'No,' and 'No,' again.

"The Turk held out money, real gold; but the other would not be tempted; and I, who had thought the ruffian capable of any treachery at a price, was beginning to wonder what all the talk was about.

"At last the intruder gave it up. He rose, and, turning to me, 'I thank you, sir,' he said; 'good evening.'

"He bowed and was on the point of leaving us; but I, as usual thirsting for information, asked him to explain matters. 'You will excuse me?' I ended. 'It must be something very extraordinary for this fellow to refuse it.'

"'I have offered the pig a very good place,' he answered, 'and he will not take it. A little dangerous, but he will be armed; and, really, it is I who run the danger.'

"This sounded interesting, so I asked him to resume his seat, and he ignored the other, and,

speaking with a characteristic vehemence, exposed the whole situation.

"He was an Ottoman Turk, I gathered, with two or three estates up country, and when he rode about or drove about, it was the custom to take an armed man or two with him as an escort. There was no danger, but it was safer so. 'This fellow is the kind of man I want,' he continued, 'and he will not leave the city. He has already lost an eye, he says; but that was when he became a Comitadji. What can one expect? I do not ask him to fight or plunder. I want somebody who will ride with me as a kind of servant. It is not very far from here—fifteen kilometers. He would live in my own house, in my own village. There is nothing to fear.'

" 'When do you want him?' I asked.

" 'To-night—at once. The last man I had was not very lucky. He has heard of it, and he prefers to rot in Saloniki.'

"I translate very literally and baldly; but this Turkish gentleman's French was very literal and bald. As you may have already guessed, he had made me think of Bruce and of my bet; and here was a job going with very good money hanging

to it, and one could make one's own conditions as to payment.

"The bey—he was a bey, I afterward discovered—beys grow thick in the East like knights in England—well, he had explained all this to me very fully if not quite frankly, and no one could have been more surprised than he when suddenly I offered myself and said I stood at his service.

" 'You are joking, sir,' he said.

" 'Not at all. I am an Englishman stranded here, and I have to earn my living.'

"He looked at me dubiously, and, when I repeated my offer, 'You can ride and shoot?' he asked.

" 'I have served two years in His Majesty's cavalry,' I said. It was literally true. As a boy I had enlisted. But that 's a story that will keep.

" 'You were an officer?' he asked.

" 'No, a common trooper.'

"The last admission made a difference, and he was a shade less polite when next he spoke to me.

" 'If you are serious,' he said, 'we can try.

It is not too safe or very pleasant,' he added. 'You Englishmen are spoilt, and your clothes—but I can find you clothes of the country.'

"'I will want a week's money in advance,' I said, 'before we are clear of Saloniki. Once out there—who knows?'

"'Good,' said he; 'and now we can start.'

"He was for ignoring my mystified guide, the one-eyed rapscallion in the corner; but I stopped to give the fellow a small backsheesh, and the bey added a coin to it.

"There was my bag at the hotel and the bill to pay. I told my new employer of this and that he had better meet me there, or, if he wished it, he could accompany me and wait while I packed up and settled. He hesitated; then, 'On the word of an Englishman,' he said. It is a common expression throughout the East and one that our new politicians are apt to ignore."

Vignolles continued after this sally, after registering this note of disapproval. It was a matter on which at times he had shown considerable feeling.

"I gave him my word," he resumed, "and then the bey counted out five pieces of gold, and handed me his card, and spelt out the name of

my new address. I made a note of it under a street lamp; it was a village called Arakli.

"'In half an hour I shall call for you,' he said and left me; and there I stood, with my bet already as good as won. I don't think I thought very much further. In a week I would come back, and Bruce would have to acknowledge that I had been right; that a man, single and not too old—but I think you've heard that tale before; or, you would have, had you been listening."

I waited, and Vignolles rose from his chair and mixed himself another drink; and, looking round the comfortable room, "This is better than Macedonia," he said; "you can take my word for it!"

"But we have n't come to Macedonia yet," I reminded him.

"No, we're just getting there." And then: "I packed and I tipped the hotel servants," he pursued, "and when I came to the office and asked for my bill, 'It's all right; that is paid until to-morrow morning,' said the cashier, 'Mr. Bruce has paid for both.'

"I complimented him upon his honesty, which made him laugh. He was an Austrian, with a

knowledge of other places. And next I said, 'I 'll be back in a few days; if Mr. Bruce inquires, you may tell him I have gone into the country.'

"'To buy tobacco?' he asked. 'I could recommend you a very good firm here—in the town itself,' he added.

"'I 'll be back in a few days,' I answered, and wished him a good evening.

"When I came out, there stood the one-eyed man, looking for a new client. The bey joined us with an open carriage and a pair of wiry little ponies. A servant was on the box, and the one-eyed pirate saluted as we entered and drove off.

"The bey turned from him in disgust. 'He is a coward,' he said.

"'Well, why were you so anxious to secure him?' was the natural rejoinder.

"'There is not much choice,' said the bey. 'Wait till you know something of Macedonia!' And then he added: 'Why does not England take it over, or France, or Germany? I dare hardly do what I like with my own land! To-morrow you will see it.'

"We went through the lower or Frankish part of the town, and then uphill to the Turkish

quarter, where the bey had a house, one of those mysterious affairs, seen from the outside, all blind walls and barred and bolted gateway, behind which waited his women-folk and their attendants. He pointed it out to me as we drove by; and, 'It is very tiresome to have to leave,' he said, 'but business is business.'

"We turned to the left, reaching a cobbled street that gave on to a main road bordered with Moslem cemeteries—acres and acres of them! It was a night with a late moon, and I could see quite plainly—all those phallic symbols, standing erect under the clear sky. We passed a large white building that was a barracks, and another that was a hospital, and next came open country and one of those strange mounds, site of a prehistoric stronghold, which are a feature of Macedonia; and after that there was night and the quiet of the hills. It seemed a beautiful country, silent under a moon that obliterated its desolation, its utter poverty, and its abominations. A beautiful country; but bare and barren as an open hand, and just as empty! The bey gave me a loaded automatic pistol: 'In case,' he said. But nothing happened to us, and not another soul seemed to be astir. The railway takes

a different road and is hidden behind the mountains. We, too, left the wide moors, and the hills drew closer together till they made a wall in front of us. We entered a narrow pass and threaded it, exchanging good nights with two Turkish soldiers who stood at the door of a blockhouse; and at last we came out, overlooking a great plain and a lake, spread far below and lovely in the moonlight. A village going up in flame hung on the edge of the horizon. Such was the bey's cold explanation when I asked. 'These cursed Comitadjis!' he added. 'Soon there will be nothing left!'

"Bulgar and Greek were at each other's throats, anticipating a division of this wild country. 'You will understand that we find our Christians troublesome,' said the bey; 'with their hatreds, their schools, and their propaganda. Why can they not keep quiet like other people?'

"It was no concern of mine, and I kept silent while we came downhill, reached the level, and took a road that branched off to the right. We crossed an iron bridge, a curiously civilized kind of structure to find in such a wilderness. But presently we came to trees and even to patches of cultivation, and one could see that this well-

watered plain had its inhabitants. Except for the glow of the burning village far away, no lights shone out from any building; but one heard the baying of a dog, the hooting of owls, and the hee-haw of a jackass. A flight of wild fowl passed overhead and we could catch their chatter. 'Soon we shall arrive,' said my companion.

"Arakli, our destination, lay at the end of an abominable track which branched from an abominable road. It was a triangle of thatched hovels, about two hundred yards at its base, enclosing noisome mounds of refuse, dilapidated pigsties, and tumble-down hen-houses. In this enclosure the village dogs roamed at night, so fierce and so hungry that we had to beat them off as we descended before a kind of house that stood a little apart and rose one story higher than the other buildings of the place. For safety's sake, Arakli was concentrated round the three sides of its communal midden, piggery, and yard; and the bey lived in the house, his people in the hovels, while a tiny church and school and parsonage stood in the near angle. To-night the place was rather ghostly, as I followed the bey into his house and up a flight of stairs.

'This is your room,' he said, opening a door on the first landing. 'You will find a candle and you probably have matches.' With that he left me and went off to his own quarters.

"We were both of us tired and I could have lain down and slept anywhere, so it was just as well that I did not examine my new abode too closely. But in the morning light I saw it as it was, with its broken windows, its naked floor, and the straw mattress and couple of frowsy quilts which had been given me for bed, bedstead, and bedding. There were an earthenware pitcher and a basin, and a three-legged stool in the center of the room upon the rotten boarding. It was like a jail, except that the door would n't fasten. Out of the window I saw the village wide awake; its women filling their tin cans at two wells, its men wetting their hands and faces or leading their animals to water. I went down and filled my own pitcher and had some kind of a wash.

"The bey sent me in some breakfast, and, now that he had got me out there, and, so to speak, in his clutches, he was most deuced off-hand and inhospitable. I had some cheese, some coffee, and some olives and a slab of bread, and when

I was done I waited. An old woman, a Greek, had attended to me, and she came in now and cleared away, and the poor old thing seemed sorry for me, though I could n't understand her. I could understand nobody in all that place except the bey; and him I was beginning to understand completely. But, still, I had taken his money; and there was my bet. I could stick out a week of this, or so I fancied.

"Toward nine o'clock he came in to me, with some clothes, a Mauser carbine, and a belt of cartridges. 'You will carry these and your automatic pistol,' he said, 'and here is your new uniform.' This was a sheepskin coat of the country, a pair of leather gaiters, a pair of riding-breeches, and a round fur cap, of a sort of moldy astrakhan. They were none of them 'new,' but I have seen worse. Properly equipped, and dressed in all this toggery, I would look a fair old brigand!

"To-day, however, we were only going on foot, and there was no need to keep him waiting.

" 'I am making an inspection of this property,' he said, in his stilted French. 'You will walk with me, and, if there is any trouble, you must shoot. I have another man, Yanni, who will

join us. The shepherds here are a little difficult.'

"Now, the exact proposition we were up against requires a word or two of explanation. The bey made it clear as we went along, and was not too haughty to answer a few questions; indeed, on this matter, he was well informed and even loquacious.

"His land hereabouts had from time immemorial been used as pasture or grazing-land. The shepherds, a nomadic race, neither Greek nor Slav nor Turk, but simply 'shepherds,' roamed with their flocks from Thessaly in Greece to Turkish Macedonia, and Arakli, with its loamy plain, was a favorite winter pasturage. For generations a group of them had paid for and enjoyed grazing rights over the bey's property; but to-day he wished to clear them out. A friend of his in Constantinople had procured him a valuable contract and the bey had parted with a good deal of ready cash. He made no secret of it. They had bribed a minister, paid backsheesh to his underlings, and there was his friend's commission. It was arranged that he should plow up all the best of this land and sow it with grain for the imperial cavalry.

He had contracted to deliver an immense quantity by the following autumn; and now every man in his village and every ox and ass and mule and horse he could lay hands on had started to plow up the estate. The shepherds hovered on the outskirts of this activity, vowing to prevent what they considered an outrage on their rights. But so far they had only threatened and fired a few shots into the village after nightfall. Should they attempt anything more serious, it was my business and Yanni's business to cope with them.

"The little rascal explained all this to me as we strode along, watching the men at work behind the light plows he had had sent down from Austria. Acre after acre of this virgin soil was being laid bare and open to the birds—wagtails mostly—that followed the plows and feasted. The shepherds, coming out of their reed camps and enclosures, watched us; but, beyond black looks and blacker imprecations, let us alone. A great dog trotted at our heels. I must have looked a perfect ass, dressed in my European clothes and carrying a carbine and a belt of cartridges. The bey in his fez and long frock-coat was bad enough! But still I felt that here was

I, earning what, in Macedonia, was considered an honest living.

"It was lovely weather, warm in the sun and blue overhead; but toward dusk it clouded, and next morning an icy wind was blowing; the bey called it 'the Vardar.' It is a wind which comes down the valley of the Vardar River from the great snow-covered mountains to the north; from the real Balkan ranges up in Serbia and Bulgaria. Nothing else had happened overnight, except that a shot or two had been fired through our broken windows and had made holes in the plaster on the walls. But I did n't mind that. It was the utter dreariness of the place after nightfall that I hated, when I lay in the dark or by candle-light with the rats playing about me and the world all black outside. It was dark at five o'clock and day only broke after seven.

"The villagers, a primitive and misshapen race of semi-savages, I could not understand, and they looked upon me with fear and suspicion as a stranger. Even the children avoided me. Yanni, the foreman, I could not understand, and he evidently regarded me as a potential rival. The old woman who looked after the bey was, I felt, sorry for me. The bey himself was a greedy

hog and only anxious to fill his contract and get his money and spend it in Europe and in Saloniki. For me he had no use beyond the immediate purpose for which he had hired me. Small wonder that on this second morning, with the icy wind blowing outside and the water frozen in my pitcher, I began to feel a little in need of encouragement.

"Outdoors, with the ground so hard, our work had come to a standstill. We led out the animals, and they refused the stone-cold water from the wells. Brutally galled most of them were, and underfed and overdriven; but to-day they had a rest. The bey crouched over his fire in the living-room and complained and said he had 'a fever.' I went below and looked in at the village church, where a woman was haggling with the priest over the price of a baptism. She had the infant at her breast; and all three were hideous and malformed—the priest, the woman, and the child. They fought for some time over those few piasters, and other villagers joined in. I poked round the church and saw its pitiful, tawdry ikons; and when the child had been baptized, the priest invited me into his house, which contained two rooms. In one of them he

taught school, and in the other he lived and slept with his wife and five children. It was a pathetic place. No wonder he had bargained like a demon; and to-day it was cold as—I forget which particular hell of the lot is the cold one. I gave him a shilling or two when I had seen what he had to show me; and—hang it!—if he did n't start bargaining and lamenting once more, just as he had done with the woman whose child he had baptized! I 'm afraid I drove him away after that and went out into the icy fields.

"My sole companion out there was an old donkey, which, it being ancient and useless, some kind soul had hit over the neck with a hatchet and left to die. A great red wound gaped wide against the gray; and I began to grow even more heartily sick of Arakli than I had been before. I put the poor thing out of its pain, with my pistol, and it seemed to say 'thank you,' in its dumb way before it dropped. Yes, I was growing most utterly tired of the place. Still, I would stick it out. To-day was Thursday; and on Tuesday, or even Monday night, I would be free.

"I wandered on and came to a dwarf oak with a great nest in its topmost branches; and there

sat a lady eagle and looked down on me. I had never seen an eagle before at such close quarters. My troubles seemed to lift at that, and I stood there as though I had found a friend at last, a living thing that I could understand. The eagle was not so taken. After a few seconds it flapped its wings and flew away into the sky. And I was as before—cold, exiled, unwashed, ill-housed, and thoroughly sick of my friend the bey and Macedonia. 'Damn Bruce!' I said; and meant it.

"I went back to the village and discovered that it was New Year's Eve, being the thirty-first of December by the Greek calendar and the twelfth of January by ours; though the way I found it out was not through calendars, but from the sudden and bloodthirsty activity which had come over all those uncouth and misshapen creatures in the hovels. Armed with their long, sharp knives, they were chasing the pigs which had been housed in the dilapidated sties of the enclosure. The pigs knew that their hour was come and were running and screaming round the village. One after another, they were caught and stabbed to death. The old priest, with his skirts gathered, led the field; but it was n't hunting, and it

was n't murder. It was a massacre! The dogs went round licking up the blood; and I retired to the house and sat alone upon my three-legged stool. At five o'clock it was pitch-dark, with the dogs all loose and furious in the enclosure; but in the hovels it was New Year's Eve, and every pot was a-boiling and full of pig, and next day there would be feasting and a holiday.

"I sat in the dark, and the rats ran round, and that confounded bey never came near me; till I began to feel like shooting him myself, instead of leaving it to the shepherds. He was *Kef*-ing, I suppose; which means making your mind a dead blank and 'getting into touch with the infinite.' So the highbrow people explain it; but my own explanation is quite different. He was probably thinking what he was going to eat and drink and cuddle when he got back to Saloniki.

"The old Greek woman came in to me with my supper and a bottle of wine and I believe she wished me a happy New Year and a merry Christmas; but I was feeling very far from happy and the poor old girl knew it. All night I heard the villagers, escaped for a few hours from their dismal lives, from the squalor and

the degradation of their servitude. They must have had mastic and wine with their meat; for next morning the place was silent and not a soul moved in the yard outside. Even the dogs looked drunk.

"The bey, however, was sober enough. He came in search of me shortly after I had finished breakfast and taken a stroll with a cigarette. He found me in the fields.

" 'Ah, there you are!' he cried.

"I was disgruntled and fed up with him; and he knew it; could read it in my face, I suppose; in the look of unconcealed disgust I handed out to him.

" 'You English are spoilt,' he began. 'You want tea at five o'clock in the afternoon, and jam and cake, like children.'

"This, of course, made me smile, and that annoyed the little hook-nosed blighter, with his Kaiser Bill moustache and mousy eyes. He was a rodent in appearance, and rather a rat generally; but he had the pull over me, or he thought he had.

"My smile had upset him; so, 'You English, with your cursed superiority!' he yapped. 'No wonder the other nations detest you!'

"'I thought I 'd come here to save you from being shot like the dog you are, and not to talk politics,' I answered as politely as I was able.

"'You are ready enough to take our money,' he replied. But at that I had fished out his five pieces of gold and he well knew what was coming.

"'Forgive me,' he said, changing all of a sudden. 'In the morning I am not very amiable. I smoke too much, and these Christian feasts, this New Year of theirs—everybody is drunk and we can get no work done.' The little beast was almost cringing.

"The real object of his search for me, however, was not to exchange views on religion and politics, but to give me my orders for the day.

"'There will be no work here for the rest of this week,' he said; 'and even if these peasants were sober, the frost would keep us idle. To-day we will go over to one of my other properties where the peasants are good Turks. We want more animals for plowing; half of those we have are growing useless. We will ride,' he pursued, 'and if I were you I would leave my money behind in a secret place. You can bury it in a hole in the ground, for one never knows what

may happen. In half an hour the horses will be ready.' And with that he left me, and I went back to the house and changed into my 'uniform'; and then, as a precaution, I actually did divide my money into halves, and the one I put into my pocket and the other I stuffed into the middle of my straw mattress. There was n't much, anyway; but, whatever happened, I was pretty sure of getting back to Saloniki. It was curious now how that deadly hole was fast becoming a paradise. Compared with Arakli, it was one.

"Yanni, who for some reason or other—probably because he was paid for it—had kept sober, had saddled up all three horses, though he managed to make me understand that in future I could see to my own. It was pleasant, however, to get a leg over anything that trotted or cantered, so I thanked him and looked the little mare over, pulled out the stirrup leathers, tested the girth, and chucked out half the stuff around her mouth. She was a chestnut with a blaze, and quite fresh and in good heart, and she danced round the yard as we mounted. Each of us had a day's feed and our own grub tied in a bag to the saddle. I had my carbine and pistol

and lots of cartridges, and, for the first time since I had arrived in that accursed place, I felt really and truly happy.

"Yanni and the bey rode like tailors; to them a horse was only a means of locomotion; but I 'm afraid I let my little lady out when we came to anything soft enough, and all that day I was her most obedient servant. It was long since I had handled anything so human. She ate my sugar and part of my bread, she tried to throw me when we came to water, she shied at a dead tortoise on the road, and lashed out at a dog that threatened her hind quarters. She teased me and tried me, but by evening we were friends. The bey, I learnt, had bought her for his own use, but she had flung him into a dung-heap at their first tussle and gone back laughing to her stall. He was still very sore about it and hit her over the flank when we gave him the chance. I imagine the villagers rather spoilt her. It would be natural. Me she carried gaily along that day, and I gave her as much as I dared on the hard ground.

"We went across the plain, then skirted the mountain that our Tommies later christened 'Gibraltar,' and so north on tracks feet deep in

mud when it thawed the following morning. Balkan mud! It's easily the worst mud in the world.

"We met nobody except the shepherds, who came out of their reed enclosures and scowled at us; for the rest of the population was celebrating the New Year, and there were no Turkish villages before we got to Kalabek, our destination. And half the villages we passed were but empty shells and blackened ruin, the work of those political Comitadjis, who were all dispersed and having a holiday to-day and hidden with their Greek or Bulgar sympathizers. At intervals we ran into a post of the *gendarmerie,* and the first night we slept on the floor of a horrible Greek inn, but the second night we were clean and comfortable in the guest-room of the Turkish village for which the bey had been making.

"I enjoyed those two days, and when we started out again, I felt that my bet was properly won and the good Bruce discomfited. That morning we set off early, and we rode with hardly a break, reaching Langaza Plain and the fields that led to Arakli well before sunset. The bey had a bad head; for I'm afraid that, with all his principles and his strictures on the Gen-

tile he had imbibed pretty freely the night before from a private supply of cognac. Yanni was cautious and afraid; but no one molested us—it was a Sunday—and when we came to the spot where the shepherds had scowled at us, we found their reed encampment deserted and not even a dog to bark at us or snarl as we rode by.

"An ominous silence attended our home-coming on that fine, clear afternoon. There was a similar splendor of sunshine as on the first day after my arrival; but something had changed; and when we sighted the village, a dull smell hit our nostrils, and a smolder of smoke rose from the buildings on the bey's side of the triangle.

"The villagers themselves awaited us, furtive and afraid; and next the bey came out of his thoughts and began to realize what had happened. He asked questions and got his hang-dog answers. The shepherds had avenged themselves, it seemed. A third of Arakli had been set on fire, beginning with the bey's house and its adjacent hovels. All the barns and outbuildings which held his stores, his plows and implements, had gone as well. The shepherds had done their work thoroughly. The animals were

mostly saved, and staring at us from where they nosed in the enclosure; amid its filth, its flies, and rotting shelters. The animals were mostly saved; but there would be no more turning up of that rich pasture-land before next winter; and even then the bey would have his hands full.

"You can imagine the rage and fury of that spoilt little man! I will not attempt to describe it. There was his house, reduced to a mere shell; and his contract—literally gone to blazes! But what concerned me particularly was the fact that the contents of my kit-bag, the bag itself, the money I had stuffed into the straw mattress, my overcoat, cloth cap, and the trousers of the suit I had arrived in, were lost and gone forever. And so, after all, my bet was as good as lost; though I did have the bey's sheepskin coat and what he called my 'uniform,' and of course there were the carbine and the revolvers. But if I cleared out next evening, he would hardly leave me these; and there was no place I could see where I fancied spending the night; and there was little Juanita, too, who like me, was homeless.

"I stood there, a hand on her neck, when the bey flared up at me.

"'What are you doing?' he yelled. 'Why don't you say something? No wonder those shepherds cleared out!' he ran on. 'They are miles away now. They will cross the frontier into Greece; you will have to stop them. Ride to the *gendarmerie* barracks,' he cried; 'ride to the devil!' And then he broke down utterly, and wept and lamented, squatting on his hunkers in the mud.

"I took him at his word; for I was n't a missionary; and he was such a little bounder—and I suppose I was fed up with him.

"'I 'm for Saloniki,' I said, mounting the little chestnut.

"At that he rose in a horrible rage.

"'You are! You are!' he cried; and then he sang out something to Yanni. What he said I could not understand; but to me he yelled, 'Get off my horse and give me back the pistol and the carbine you have stolen, and my clothes! You can go to the devil! You dirty swine of an English pauper! I dismiss you; you have had your money!'

"I was on Juanita's back when Yanni raised his carbine, and then I saw what the game was. They wanted to turn me out on foot and half

destitute. I dug my heels into the little mare and she answered.

"Yanni had the first shot. It missed me, and before he could load again I whipped out the automatic pistol and had the pair of them cold. I 'm not a bad shot, and I aimed at the ground a foot in front of where each of them was standing. The bey fled yelping indoors. Yanni jumped a yard into the air, a damned good yard; so I gave him another and kept him jumping. The bey poked his head out of a window-frame and I let him have one to the right and one to the left. It was risky, but I aimed wide, and, if anything, a trifle high. His red fez, hook-nose, and silly Kaiser moustache disappeared after that, and I have never seen any of them since; and I can't say I 've missed them. All the villagers were looking on, and I believe they thoroughly enjoyed it. For, all said and done, it was about as good as a Charlie Chaplin film, and in some ways a darned sight better.

"I gave Yanni a parting shot between his boots, flung the carbine at his ugly head, and told the little mare that it was now or never. She put her nose down and off we went; out of that God-forsaken village, through the field with

the dead donkey, and past the dwarf oak where I had seen the eagle on her nest; and then I gave Juanita a breather. Next morning we walked in at the Vardar Gate and took our ease in Saloniki.

"We put up at the Olympus Palace Hotel again, where I handed her over to the head porter; while I retired upstairs to a good bedroom, ordered a hot bath, and, when I was properly aired and clean and comfortable, lay down and had a real sleep in a real bed. The Olympus Palace Hotel was even finer than its name on that particular morning.

"At the cashier's office down below I had found a letter from Bruce. It was dated on the Wednesday.

" 'I guess you 've won that bet,' he began; 'the man here says you 've departed up country to buy tobacco. One lie more or less don't matter in this part of the world, anyway; and so I let it go. We 'll meet next Tuesday at one o'clock sharp, unless I get shanghaied, marooned, or pirated. There 's an English captain I 've met here who is taking his ship Athens way. He says I can come along and that he 'll get somebody to bring me back here by Tuesday morning.

I 've always wanted to see the Parthenon and the Acropolis and the gold things in the museum that belonged to Agamemnon, and I may get to Mycenæ itself with any luck. We sail to-night, and if I 'm not back by Tuesday—well, I 'll post you from there if I 'm delayed. And here 's the twenty Turkish pounds I 've lost to you, in case things have n't panned out exactly right.'

"It was decent of him to think of that, but Americans of the right sort are about the most decent thing on earth. And, on reflection, it occurred to me that I might need the money. Anyhow, as soon as I felt like it, I sent for my Austrian friend behind the pay-desk.

" 'I want a European overcoat,' I said, 'a suit of pajamas, a pair of trousers, a tooth-brush, a leather bag, a comb and hair-brushes, and a few more things. I want them to-day. Where can I get them?'

" 'At Herrera's,' said he, 'up in the bazaar. And say that I sent you. Did you find any good tobacco?'

"He gave me the exact direction and I went to Herrera's and spent the best part of those twenty pounds with them; and I 've no doubt but that my Austrian friend had his commission on

that deal, as he still hoped to have it on the tobacco.

"I got back with a new kit-bag and they had promised to send the trousers round as fast as they could make them; I 'm rather too long in the leg for Saloniki.

"Upstairs, in my room, I found a visitor.

" 'You permit me?' he said, rising when I entered. 'I have taken the liberty. You are connected with the house of Ginnell and Bruce—may I give you my card? We can quote you for tobacco in any quantity, of all the best districts—Cavalla, Yenidje, Latakia—and at the lowest prices.'

" 'Mr. Bruce is in Athens,' I answered.

" 'He will return?'

" 'To-morrow, I hope.'

" 'And you, sir?'

" 'What about me?'

"That rather floored him; but, still, he gave me his best smile, murmured, 'Well, I will call again to-morrow,' bowed, and left the room.

"His card was on the table where I had placed it. 'Benjamin Toledano,' I had read; and now beside the card lay a little package rolled up in

a sheet of white note-paper; a heavy little package, considering its size.

"I unfastened it and counted out twenty-five pieces of Turkish gold. This was my price, apparently; or was it my share of the spoil? I was beginning to win that bet again; although, a moment earlier, I had quite made up my mind to the fact that I had lost it; that I would have to refund Bruce's twenty pounds with twenty of my own.

"I was dwelling on these matters when another visitor came in, and he too inquired after the absent Bruce and left his card and offered to quote prices. This gentleman valued my services at thirty pounds, and from his name I judged that he was an Armenian.

"I went downstairs and had a word with my friend the Austrian cashier and told him he'd better stop it; but when I returned to my room that evening, I found the new trousers and a dozen large flasks of Chianti; and together with these were a string of amber beads the size of pigeons' eggs and a silver cigarette-case, done in the filigree-work of the place, which I had admired in a shop-window. Beside this still-

life—for it made rather a picture—was the card of a third dealer in tobacco, a Greek with a sonorous surname and an antique forename—Euripides Papanastasiou, or something similar. I locked my door after that and kept it locked till Bruce turned up next day from Athens.

"'Well, you won that bet?' he asked, as soon as I had heard *his* story.

"'Come upstairs to my room,' I answered; and when I had locked the door again, I showed him the two rolls of gold, the bottles of Chianti, the amber beads, and the filigree cigarette-case. Also I gave him a brief summary of labor conditions, trade, commerce, and industry, as experienced by myself, in Macedonia.

"'We agreed it was to be *an honest living,*' he began; and next he burst out laughing; and, 'I guess it 's honest for Saloniki,' he ended, 'though it would n't exactly do in my home town.'

"Then the two of us drove back to the old *Medusa* and continued on our way to Constantinople."

Vignolles was done; but *I* was n't quite satisfied.

"What became of that pony," I asked, "and

your new uniform, and the beads and the Chianti, and did you stick to old Benjamin Whatsername's money?"

"The little mare was all right. I went up to the police barracks, found an interpreter, and reported the matter to the colonel, a jolly old Turk with a big gray beard, who had n't been 'Europeanized.' He said he 'd see that the bey got back his property; but he also said that he could do with a little horse like that himself. And as for the beads, Mrs. Bruce got the beads, while I stuck to the cigarette-case; and we put the Chianti on the table of the *Medusa,* where an Italian friar had the half of it and the rest of us a bottle apiece. And the money? It seems that I 'd earned it and was n't particularly overpaid. At least, that 's how Bruce and I figured it out. Now, are you satisfied?"

I was.

EVE DAMER

EVE DAMER

I

VIGNOLLES was fond of pictures. Often and often he would drag me in to the most impossible shows; though some of them were n't so bad. At the Grafton, the Leicester, and all sorts of odd galleries, out in Chelsea, off Bond Street, or wherever a placard or some unusually bilious poster caught his eye. Or he might draw me in to the National Gallery itself.

"Just for half an hour," he would say; "or till we get bored. I hate reading, but I like pictures. They tell you all about it. You look, and you 're done with them. A book takes hours and hours; though there are books and books."

I have forgotten most of these exhibitions; but one I still remember. "Somebody's portraits," he had explained. "You *must* see them—at least, it said so in my morning paper—a fellow called Edwards. He 's supposed to be remarkable—and cruel—does all the nuts."

We went along together, and paid our money and bought a catalogue; and this time I really was interested; for most of these pictures were impressions of well-known people, politicians and such-like, seen from a very uncompromising angle. And between them fluttered a half-dozen "great ladies"; or, at least, ladies conspicuous in the social world or of an equally outstanding "smartness." Edwards had not been kind to them; but, still, one guessed he was the fashion and that to have one's portrait painted by him was something of a privilege. He could pick and choose.

There was Lady Caroline Semphill, I remember, an evil-looking creature; at least, Edwards had made her look evil; though to my mind—and I had met her once or twice—she was just an effusive, over-ample woman who loved to perform in the center of a crowd.

When I 'd recovered from her, I found Vignolles in the clutches of a lady clothed in leopard skins and other barbaric ornament. She was smoking a cigarette out of a long tortoise-shell holder and addressing him loudly and almost fiercely, as though she owned him and the gallery

and the pictures and the visitors, and did n't care a tinker's cuss for any of the lot.

Vignolles was not embarrassed, though he ought to have been. But it takes a good deal to embarrass Vignolles; and here was a case in point.

"What do you think of *me?*" we heard her ask him; and next she had led him off to where she was shown as only Edwards dared show her. A predatory object, a veritable bird of prey, he had made of her; with her aquiline nose slightly accentuated, hard-eyed, and hands that looked like claws.

"You are n't as bad as all that," said Vignolles, smiling. "What are you going to do to him?"

"Keep him waiting," she laughed. "He 's always hard up, is n't he? Still, there 's something in it," she conceded. "And he 's got my hair right—he 's got *that* right." One gathered she was proud of her hair.

In the portrait there were coils of it, and a tawny mass below the wreath that crowned her. She was in an evening gown, and the face was n't any too pleasant—brazen, lean, nervous; but

Edwards had somehow managed to show you the somber glory of her hair. And it was n't dyed, either, though he 'd been pretty rough on the made-up face below it.

"Let 's have a drink," said Vignolles, when she 'd done with him.

He had n't presented me, nor in any way drawn me in; but, of course, I knew who she was without looking her up in the catalogue. For years that fine face of hers had been in all the picture-papers. No, it was n't by any means a fine face as Edwards had drawn it; yet, not so very long ago, it *had* been fine, filled with vitality, and daring, and power of a certain kind; and, even now, Edwards, if he had liked, could have done something else with it.

"Did n't know you knew her," I said, as we went down the stairs together.

"Rather astonishes me sometimes, as well," he answered. "I don't know why she keeps it up. I 'm no use to her; never was, for that matter. I suppose she 's got what she wanted," he ended; "Damer 's in the limelight, and she 's got a double dose of it. You can't escape her, can you?"

No, try as one might, there was no escaping

Mrs. Damer; nor Damer, either, for that matter. He, of course, is in politics; and Mrs. Damer is in everything else.

II

We 'd had our drink and taken a turn in the the Park before Vignolles came out with it. Now, close to the dinner hour, the London season in full blast, there were a good many potential Mrs. Damers strolling here or sitting in the dull-green chairs. But it would require a special kind of courage to go as far as she had gone, and a fiercer egotism than any one might read on these controlled and guarded faces; and a fiercer intelligence, too, I guessed, from what I knew of some of them.

We 'd chosen our places under a spreading tree that made a pool of shadow. We were alone and yet not alone, as one often is in London. To Vignolles, who had wandered so far and forever been much of a spectator, if not an actual outsider, there was always a certain grim enjoyment to be found in any place like this. I remember he began by telling me about a maiden aunt of his who 'd died and left him five hundred

pounds. It was n't much; but it was the price of what he called a "beano"; and "Guess what I did with it?" he asked me, grinning pleasantly.

"Put it in the savings bank," I suggested.

He grinned some more.

"No, I spent it on these people, the kind you see around you. It was n't bad fun. They were worth it."

"You moved in what is called Society?" I asked him.

"I suppose that 's what one would call it. I certainly moved. I went to the West Indies and back; I had a week in Scotland and some months here—trying to be respectable. It did n't agree with me."

We sat on in the long summer evening; we dined; and then we sat again; and by the time we separated and sought our beds that night, I had the story of the maiden aunt and her five hundred pounds. It threw a little light on Mrs. Damer. Yet, as Vignolles said, "It might have been some other girl; it just happened to be she. Twenty-five years ago—that makes her about fifty—" But I will let him tell the rest of the story, instead of getting at it in snatches.

III

Twenty-five years ago, it began; I 'd had a spell of England. There was that five hundred pounds to collect, and I had just a hankering, a sort of a romantic hankering, to see my father and my mother. They did n't approve of me. I had n't taken the snaffle and the curb; I had n't settled down as a Vignolles ought. There was the family business, and no one to carry it on if I backed out. And I had backed out; run away at sixteen and joined the army, and been to sea when I 'd done with that, and wandered a trifle round half the globe. I 'd written to my sister occasionally. It was she who 'd told me about the five hundred; but, apart from her, nobody seemed to care much. They 'd given me up as a bad job. Still, as I said to my father once: "We Vignolles have been in trade for three generations; it 's about time one of us started doing something else. It 's against Darwin and evolution to go on forever." He was hot on Darwin and Huxley in his way; yet when it came to a matter of business, he threw his hobbies overboard and what had been good enough for

him was good enough for me. However, for the time being, I was a sudden and sumptuous capitalist, and I cast round for ways and means of spending my Aunt Betty's savings in a way to do her credit or to make her turn in her grave. I 'm not sure which.

It was winter, and when my family and I had had enough of one another, I found the right kind of excursion advertised in one of the papers. "Six weeks in the West Indies," it said, or something similar, and the prices ranged from a hundred guineas. First-class ship; first-class chef; everything first-class. I 'd never traveled that way before—usually worked my passage. It 'd be a change for me; and I wanted to see the West Indies, especially in winter, when half the world was gray and cold.

I bought a steamer-trunk full of clothes, and a deck-chair and a rug, and a large-sized ulster for the first days out. I was new as a guinea and just as smart. I was n't going to impose on anybody or pretend I was the count, but, just for once in a way, I was going to wallow in the lap of luxury—and then forget it.

We started from Southampton in a gale, though in a day or two we got clear of it, into

sunshine and blue skies; but the gale had broken the ice. You can't be cold and distant when you're seasick, and so everybody was beginning to know everybody else. We were most of us leisurely people with daughters, well bred, well off, with a sprinkling of stock-brokers and rich men from the City. A few of us had titles, and a couple of bishops and a dean and a newspaper-proprietor kept an eye on us; and, taking us all in all, we were a classy crowd. And as I had n't been seasick and had made myself useful, I was beginning to get popular and thoroughly enjoyed it. I liked these people: most of them were born loafers like myself; but they could afford it all the time, and, of course, I could n't. I dare say I might have found a lady with enough money for both of us—a trifle tough, perhaps, and not too young. However, I was n't out for that game. Nor any other worth mentioning. I was out for fun—for six good weeks of it—and then I 'd disappear.

Well, it was pretty amusing. I 've told you I liked these people. They were out for fun as well; and as I 'd had no youth worth mentioning, I found myself making up for it like a boy just fresh from school. At thirty-odd one has no

business to be so confoundedly young; but this was a holiday, the first real let-up I 'd had in fifteen years; and in many ways my life had been a hard life, though in other ways it had n't.

To me those people were so much cream. They had breeding, manners, freedom, and good looks. I dare say I exaggerated it all, just as a housemaid does who 's reading a story about a duke. But on the surface—and I needed no more than the surface—these were the most marvelous people that I had ever struck.

I learnt to dance again, and I played cards with the men and sometimes with the women, and by the time we were nine days out I 'd made one or two friendships of a kind. There was a dark girl with masses of tawny hair; there was a man who 'd smashed himself up hunting and been ordered a sea-voyage after months in bed. These two I remember; the rest are all forgotten or else blurred. The dark girl's mother is just a gracious shadow nowadays, and I don't think she ever was much more.

As you may have guessed, I was pretty simple, one of those prattlers who, given a little encouragement, come out with everything, empty the whole bag. I found myself telling that dark

girl all about it. Of how I had wandered and sailed and fought men with my fists; and sung in the chorus in Grand Opera and gone with pilgrims to a temple on a hill; it was rather mixed. There were horses I 'd ridden and strange towns I 'd come to, and women, half savage, half child—I slurred them over; but she wanted everything, from the scents that madden you in a tropical night to deserts where you rock on your camel and follow the stars. Thirst and hunger and danger and weariness—she wanted the whole lot. I 'd seen a good deal of the world in my own way, and most of it was cruel, looking at it from here, from this security. But she loved the cruelty of it, the hardness of it, as well as its beauty.

"You 'll see something of all that," I said, "when we touch land."

She was n't listening. She was looking me over, much as a boy might do, with shining eyes; and then, "You 're wonderful—quite wonderful," she answered, "and you don't know it!"

I dare say that found my vanity, though I pretended it did n't. I knew I was slightly different from these other men whose lives had been made for them; but that was n't being "wonder-

ful." It seemed to me then that to be "wonderful" you must have masses of gold-flecked hair and the courage to talk to a man like myself, of no account, and make a god of him.

I don't know that you would have called Eve Drummond a beauty. She was rather more than that. She had personality, daring, sex—it is these things I recall so much more than her features, her color, and the cool strength of her lithe body. There were better-looking girls on board than she; but no one half so vivid, so charged with power and energy. I guessed these at first rather than tested them; for, so far, she had only sat up in her chair and made me talk.

"Do you know, you've never had a chance," she said, sizing me up in her direct way. "Why didn't that stuffy father of yours send you to Eton and Oxford or the army? He could afford it, couldn't he?"

We must have been pretty thick by then for her to talk so freely. I know I'd confessed about the five hundred pounds. I'd kept nothing back from her: she knew me as I was, and she seemed to like it. Bless her!

IV

It's no good asking me about the West Indies. I believe we landed on a dozen islands and anchored in as many bays or harbors, or just lay out to sea, with pinnaces going and coming. And black men in boats rocked alongside and offered us things they had to sell. But that happens everywhere; and to me the West Indies are just Eve Drummond.

I don't know who began it; does one ever know, unless one is refused? And, even then. . . . But I dare say the sun began it, and that abundant leisure, and the two pagan hearts inside of us that opened as flowers open to the light. Maybe, in such a release from work and care and custom, it was the only sensible thing to do. In any case, we did it. And I have never regretted it; nor, I feel sure, has she. We ought to have closed down again when we got back to England—looked back upon it as a dream, a foretaste of Perfection—something that had never happened before, could never happen again—and been thankful. But that is anticipating. Just now we landed on islands and

ruled the world like kings and queens. We did exactly as we pleased. Old Mrs. Drummond was always gracious. I've never discovered what she thought: I only know what she said. And, perhaps, seeing me so leisured and so affluent—who knows? And the other passengers? I fancy we made a show for them, or offered them a good example. One or two followed it and became engaged.

I don't remember that we two ever *did* become engaged. Where was the use of registering the obvious, of making a contract when nothing was refused? She could have asked me for all I had to offer, and I would have given it, wondering why she asked. It was better than engagements, better than a honeymoon. We wanted nothing of one another except the magic of discovery, the revelation of companionship. Passion was there for the taking—but it was finer so. Passion is old and shadowed with death, but love is ever new; and, somehow, by instinct, by memories deeper than ourselves, we clung to this virginity, this wonder and amazement—a happiness unclouded that started afresh with each new day.

There was one island with a sandy cove we

had found, and all that afternoon we bathed from it and laughed and lay in the sun. She wore one of my new suits of pajamas and I another; and when the silk clung to her I praised her beauty; and when the great coil of her wonderful hair was loose and spread in the sun to dry, we both admired it as one might admire a picture or something impersonal made by stranger hands.

She blushed when the Spaniards of another island asked if she was my wife; they could not understand it otherwise. I had said, "Yes," and told her. We had hired ponies and ridden out on them to see the world. At a plantation we had halted, and there the women had offered us a meal; and to her it was an adventure, and these simple people thought her marvelous. She dazzled them too, just as I was dazzled, as were most people who came near her. And later there was the ride home in the moonlight with half the village keeping us company. They had decked her with flowers and stuffed my pockets with cigars; so that we went back like conquerors and found our ship and pinnaces waiting. It was an adventure, right enough, and she fairly blazed with it.

"Why go back?" she had asked; and she would have stayed. At a word she would have thrown the whole of Europe overboard and followed me. We might have found a life in Mexico, or somewhere in the South. At times I have played with the idea and wondered.

I was n't entirely mad; indeed, if one comes of a respectable family, there 's always a residuum of respectability hidden away somewhere inside of one. Perhaps it was that which held me back, which made me in some measure her champion; which all along had driven me to feel that, sooner than any harm should come to her, I would die a thousand deaths or go through fire and water. On the ship that night I took her hand in mine and kissed it—the first time I had done anything so intimate. She wanted more. She did not know she wanted more; but I did, and blessed her innocence. I had not come there to disturb it. If I did anything, I would do the only right thing and wait till we were back in England.

Beyond her and the man who had been smashed up in the hunting-field and who wheeled himself about in a special kind of chair, I don't

recollect anybody on board who mattered. This man looked on at us. Once he smiled up at me in his pleasant way; he often used to smile, and no wonder!

"Are n't you going in pretty deep?" he asked. "It 's all right out here." And then, "She 'd do well on the stage," he added; "it 's the same temperament." He followed that up with questions about the last island and wanted to know whether he 'd missed much by not getting ashore.

It might have been a warning; it might even have been meant for one. I let it go. I had no doubts; no ears for anybody else; no eyes for anybody else. She filled me. It must have been the same with her; for "Lots of men have wanted to kiss me," she once said; "but I have never wanted to kiss anybody but you. I don't know why; I can't help it."

She was amazingly frank, as the worst women are—and the best. She had a most alarming candor. It frightened many people; but me it did not frighten. For it seemed to me that I understood and knew her; and, maybe it was my pride or maybe it was out of love for her, I swore I would win her in the usual way—as her mother

had been won and her grandmother. She was worth it; she was worth anything, I said. I'd work for her; I'd settle down and win her.

V

The pair of us had no end of a hump when England showed up out of the mists and we were back in the cold weather. Those frigid shores, that tidy landscape, made us feel that all the prose of things was heaped together in this bleak island. Though it looked so rich, it looked poor enough in all that made life worth the living. Pure idiocy, of course! But, remember, we were just come out of Paradise.

I don't know that she felt it as strongly as I did. For such as she there would be alleviations; friends, the warmth and light of splendid houses, sport, money to burn, town and country, and leisure and capacity to make the most of them. Still, what I felt she felt too. We knew all about one another; how I was going to see my father and have it out with him; and then I would go North and have it out with her people. From what she said, they did not appear to be very formidable, provided one made the right

impression. She, at least, had never been afraid of them; or of anybody else, for that matter. So we had settled it. At Southampton we went ashore; in London we separated. She was going North again. In London Mrs. Drummond, Eve, and I put up for the night at the same hotel.

A maid had arrived from somewhere and a manservant. There was a house in town, but it was n't worth while opening it for the one night. The servants hovered round and took their orders; and at Euston I put Mrs. Drummond into a carriage marked "Reserved." They traveled in style. And next Eve grabbed me by the arm, and, marching me up and down the platform, "Mind you write," she said; "every blessed day. I will. And when you 've settled with your father, come up and see mine. I 'll get him ready."

Of the two, she was the man of us. I 'd never bothered much about such detail until now. I 'd lived in a less deliberate world, where individuals count and families do not exist. But I was done with all that: I realized I was done with all that. And when I took Mrs. Drummond's hand and wished her a pleasant journey and had been invited to come and visit, I realized

it very completely, and felt that that was their convention, and how I should have to fit in with it and be measured by it and stay within that way of life for all the rest of mine. But I'd accepted that, had n't I? With all my heart and soul!

Their train started, Eve's face framed in the window. I waved. She waved. Then I went off to see my father.

I found him in his office. It was a mail-day and he was busy. "Come in to-morrow," he said, "or dine with us at seven."

I went down the musty staircase; I crossed the musty yard. His packing-room and offices were in an old house since demolished; a fine old house that had formerly belonged to one of those past merchants who were n't above living where they traded. It was in Basinghall Street. But now the City of London had become too valuable and too crowded for such an extravagance.

I meandered on, tasting that flood of life, so masculine, so ant-like, and so intent. Between the Bank and Ludgate Circus I seemed the only loafer. I carried a stick and sauntered. Once or twice I caught the eye of a young man looking at me with envy. I was brown and fit and fresh.

The sea and sun had done their best for me; while here in London, at the end of a long winter, men had no color and all the druggist shops were selling stuffs for coughs and colds. That would be my life, I said. But Eve was worth it. I realized then that all those men were selling themselves for women and children and a home; and after that they seemed more human, easier to understand; even rather heroic, I felt, as I watched them, hurrying upon their business, broken into it, habituated.

In a crowded place where men sat up at a counter and wolfed their food, I had lunch; and again I detected looks of envy, almost of inquiry, as though I were one of the lucky ones who had escaped and they wanted to know my secret—how I did it. My mind went back to Arabs eating in the shade, to brown men resting beside their yoke of oxen, to the leisure and the space of sunlit lands, and people who, having filled themselves, could take their ease. There was no ease for my neighbors at the counter. One by one they bustled out and others took their places.

I wandered down Holborn, and so to Oxford Street; and now, where there had been crowds of men before, were crowds of women, gazing

into shop-windows, devouring hats and underclothing with their eyes, and frocks and fallals. It occurred to me that the men working farther east were slaving away to provide these women with money to spend in the west. I looked them over, and hardly one of them seemed worth it; and the older and harsher the woman, the more she seemed to hunger for fine clothes. I thought of other, duskier women, who let the sun ripen their beauty and sea and air put youth into their eyes. They did n't last so long, perhaps; but they gave their strength to their children, delight and service to their husbands.

I turned away. Eve Drummond was worth it all, I said to myself. She would take, perhaps, but what would she not give! And here, again, in the thin light of London, I saw the somber gold that filled her hair, laid out to the sun and spread before us like a robe. I saw her feet marking the sand, dancing toward me—she slim in those silk pajamas that clung to her and shaped her body and its pride. And I saw her again, decked with flowers, as we had ridden back amid our cloud of Spaniards, her face alight, her lips parted with the joy of an adventure. She made this London world seem common and cheap

and tawdry; and by that time I had come to Regent's Park and seated myself upon a bench.

I killed an hour at the Zoo after that and visited my friend the bison. I bought him a bag of buns and commiserated with him on the disappearance of a noble race. There are not many bisons left in the world, are there? And these few are but a survival, an exhibit more than a species.

He ate his buns; and he was old, mangy, and sorrowful; and, like me, he lived alone.

"When you die you will be stuffed," I said. "The world has n't much use for you: it could neither tame you nor find room for you, and so you 'll have to go. I 'm sorry, bison."

He finished his bag of buns and asked for more.

I brought him more.

"You, my lad, were too strong, too primitive, too simple," I began: and then the other people came along and spoilt it.

VI

I found my mother and sister at our house and we waited for my father. The house was

in St. John's Wood, one of those large gray stucco affairs which were easily run in the days when you could get plenty of servants. My father owned the house, and we children had been born and brought up in it. All that quarter of London was intimate and near to me, as it is today. The house itself, long passed to other hands, is still standing; and, somehow, a part of me will always linger there, in spite of other houses, other lands. I still remember how every time I went back to it the old familiar feel of the place hit me—of everything inside of it and outside; from the sooty trees and rhododendrons in the garden to the heavy mahogany I had looted when I was a boy; I suppose every boy has stolen things out of sideboards. There were always biscuits and figs and raisins in ours, and a sticky syrup my mother liked—you mixed it with water. And there were cupboards, too, with glass and china, and other things I 'd broken and been cursed for breaking. But here were my mother and my sister. They were not a bit surprised when I walked in.

"You 're staying for dinner?" said my mother. She would have asked a tramp to stay; it was her nature. The world to her was a place full

of people waiting to be fed, and she was there to feed them. She was a fine cook of a school that 's gone and done with; and she was n't above rolling up her sleeves and spending a morning in the kitchen.

My sister was not so proficient. She danced and went to parties; she had friends, she went shopping; and just then she had become engaged to a young stock-broker, a fellow called Carey-Holt. As a young man he was tolerable. He had his season and after that he passed into the ranks of the prosperous bores. One accepted him. There he was, and one knew exactly what he was going to say or do. But just now he was young and vivacious and Netta regarded herself as happy. I suppose she was. Happiness depends on what you want.

I don't know that I ever loved my mother or that she loved me. She was n't built that way. Some women are n't. Thinking her over calmly, I 've concluded that she was just a natural force, like wind, or rain, or sunshine. She bore her children easily; she ate and drank heartily; she slept soundly; and I 'd never known her have a day's illness. She liked to go to theaters and to foreign watering-places, and she liked to see

people sitting round her table. Instead of love she gave me a strong body. That, after all, is a good deal; and to-day, as I came in, she did n't put herself out, except to ask me to stay and share her dinner.

"Where have you been?" she added, looking up from one of my father's socks—she was mending a hole in it.

"To the West Indies and back," I answered.

She was n't astonished.

"On business?" she asked.

"No, I 've been spending Aunt Betty's savings."

She laughed at that.

"Poor old Betty!" she said. "When she was a young girl, she wanted to marry the postman; but, of course, father would n't let her; and so she never married anybody. He went off to America and did very well."

I always liked talking to her about her father. He had farmed somewhere in the north of Ireland and his chief merit, so I gathered, was to have raised seven handsome daughters. They all married well, except Aunt Betty. My own father had gone to Belfast on business; and there he had met and won my mother. It had

been rather a romance on his side. I guessed now that she would have married any man able to give her a home and some position in a big city. She loved big cities, just as she loved those foreign watering-places, or any place where she could hit on lots of people and life and bands of music. Her early years had been spent in a remote and stilly province; and to her the change was something magical and splendid. She hated talking of her father's farm and its simplicity; but late in life she was n't so averse. Yet for years she had been rather ashamed, as though confessing to something that was n't very creditable; and to me and to my sister she was at first incomprehensible, and we, no doubt, were just the same to her. But she was an easy women to get on with: she went her way and let us two take ours; till Carey-Holt came in and made a difference. . . . I suppose it 's a pity. We might have made a pal of her; but she did n't want pals, nor any of us, specially.

My father arrived and went to his dressing-room. He did n't change for dinner. He tidied himself and put on a smoking-jacket and was complete.

He had been writing hard to catch the mail

of this particular mail-day. He traded with Central and South America and the West Indies, and once a fortnight he shut himself up and wrote the more important letters, in Spanish, in French, in Portuguese. He was a fine linguist and rather a remarkable man for a City merchant.

I tackled him after dinner.

"Guv'nor," I began—I always called him "Guv'nor," which he did n't quite like, but which he had to put up with—"do you think you could find room for me in the business?" I continued.

He looked at me dubiously; and then, "Mine?" he asked. "What would you do there?"

"Same as you, I suppose. I want to settle down and make a decent living and get married."

He still looked at me dubiously.

"I 've had enough of seeing the world," I pursued; "and I suppose I 've got engaged."

"You 've got engaged?" he asked.

"Well, not exactly, but I suppose it comes to the same thing; and if I could support a wife, I 'd marry her."

"So that 's what 's tamed you?" And, after an interval, "A girl you met on the steamer?"

"A Miss Drummond, a daughter of Drummond's, up in Scotland. They build ships and there are iron-works and coal-mines; I believe they 're rich."

"But surely a girl like that would n't marry *you!*"

"I don't think she 'd object," I answered.

"But her father—her family—"

"Perhaps they would n't object. There 's nothing serious against me. I have n't robbed anybody, or murdered anybody, or been in prison, or been divorced, or done anything that people make a fuss about."

"You 're sure it 's Drummond's?" replied my father.

"Quite," said I.

He was very much impressed. He could n't help being impressed. His values were commercial; and in trade or industry the name stood mountains high—among the very highest! Far, far higher for instance, than Vignolles Brothers and Company of Basinghall Street.

"Well, if you 're serious, I 'll tell you what I will do," he began. "You can have a place at the office. I 'll try you for six months, and if you 're in earnest I may be able to find room for

you. It 's not a bad business, really. You speak a little Spanish—"

"Quite a lot," I interrupted him, "and Arabic, French, German, and some Italian and a little Russian. Perhaps I could learn to write them."

He was rather impressed by that as well, I remember.

"You might be a good deal of use to me," he said. "Come in to-morrow and talk it over. I won't be busy in the morning."

We joined my mother and sister after that and my father read the evening paper, and young Carey-Holt came round and sang to us and was pretty cordial.

My mother got out that awful raspberry syrup of hers and mixed it with water, and there were biscuits and cake and wine and things that came out of the sideboard, and the Guv'nor's very excellent cigars.

I did n't tell my sister anything that evening.

"Where are you staying?" she asked.

"At Green's."

"You *are* grand!" she chaffed me, helping me on with my overcoat.

"Only another night of it, and then the gran-

deur will be over. Perhaps the Guv'nor is going to give me a job."

"You!" she answered. "He used to say he 'd like to have you, but for years he 's given you up—talks about selling the business and retiring. And when I get married this house 'll be too large—"

"See you to-morrow evening," I replied; and went down the front steps lightly, and so into the street. She returned to Carey-Holt, indoors.

It was a moonlight night and I walked the way back to the hotel; past Lord's, past the Canal and Baker Street; and then I was in town again, in the heart of London, with Eve Drummond fast in mine; and her dear face—well, you know what an ass one is, don't you?

At the hotel, a most select affair—it looked as much like a private house as it could do and the servants all pretended I was a duke—at the hotel I found a telegram; and I had to read it twice before I tumbled to it. Eve and her mother had reached their home; but not before my girl had waltzed into the local post-office and wired, "Here 's to us. Who 's like us? Dam few!"

VII

My father was always an early bird and in his office at nine. Next morning I got there before him and he seemed surprised and rather pleased about it.

"You here?" he said; and evidently he had formed some sort of notion that I was a roving kind of vagabond with what are called Bohemian tastes and habits, and not very reliable when it came to keeping hours.

We settled down together at once.

"I am willing to give you a trial," he said; "but you 'll start at the bottom, the same as I did, and if you 're any good you 'll be promoted."

I had nothing to say to that.

"And we can't have you living at home; you 're not used to an ordinary house. You 'll have to find a room somewhere, and then you can come in and go out as you please."

I had nothing to say to that.

"You can have dinner with us every evening if you want to. It 's at seven. But we go to bed at ten or shortly after. Perhaps you 'll want some money to begin with. I 'll give you two pounds a week; I 've managed on less."

"I 've got some of Aunt Betty's over," I replied; "that 'll keep me going the first six months. But I 'll want a week's holiday as soon as it 's arranged; I want to go up North and see old Drummond."

"Well, you can have that too if you like; but, in future, there will be no privileges. You 'll be the same as all the rest of us. There 's a desk in the outer office; tell Mr. Niederer to get it ready for you"; and with that I was dismissed and my father settled to the morning's correspondence.

It came out after a while in a basket, and Mr. Niederer, who was a kind of managing-clerk and foreign correspondent, sorted it out and handed some of it to Mr. Nairn, the bookkeeper, and some went to Lee, the packing-clerk, and now the day's work could begin.

It had been agreed that I was at liberty to hunt for rooms to-day and remove my belongings from the hotel. I found a bedroom and a little sitting-room in a small house near the family abode, close to a terrace of shops and reasonably cheap. I moved in that same afternoon, had tea in comfort by myself, and afterward went round to the house for dinner.

It was the same performance as the night before, with me definitely recognized as the Prodigal returned. Young Carey-Holt, I remember, seemed to think I 'd been on one long spree, among thieves and harlots and foreigners. It had n't been quite like that, however.

"You were two years in the army?" he asked.

"I wanted to know something about horses; it was the easiest way."

The little blighter had never been anywhere, nor seen anything, nor done anything, except run round his Stock Exchange with a notebook and persuade people to buy shares or sell them, and I dare say he had bought and sold a bit on his own account. He had made money over it, apparently, for he rather fancied himself on that score, and the wedding was fixed and not far off.

My mother seemed to think him a fool for giving up his liberty, but, otherwise, a very desirable match. My father accepted him, as one accepts the inevitable, and was prepared to make a suitable settlement. Netta was in love with him, I suppose; and he is the father of her children. Women can stand a deal of Carey-Holt on those terms.

I cleared off early that evening, after agreeing to escort my mother to a theater on the next one; she had the tickets. And in the new sitting-room, with the lamp burning and the fire alight, I sat for an hour and wrote to Eve.

I'd come up when she liked and see her father, I said; and I dutifully reported what progress I had made with mine. And I dare say I told her that London was a desert and that I missed her, missed her, and felt an absolute orphan and a confounded widow.

All that week I followed the same programme, till the Monday came with Mrs. Drummond's invitation. I went up to Scotland on the Friday.

VIII

Eve's father was a remarkable man; so far the most remarkable I had ever met at close quarters. Perhaps I had come across others just as big, but I had never known them as I was to know him. He just let everything rip till the second Saturday of my visit, but all those eight days he must have been watching us and taking me in; so that when he spoke, as, at last, he did speak, he seemed to know me better than

I knew myself. Meanwhile, we had kept to safer topics.

Of him, before then, I knew that as a boy he had been put into the navy, had thrown it up and gone into commerce, industry, and anything that came along. I knew that he was a younger son, that his father had held an ancient title, now passed to a brother, and that, if he had liked, he could have had one of his own. Eve had told me so much.

He seemed to take little notice of me the first eight days. He was away at his iron-works, at his shipyards, at his other concerns that ran along the Clyde. He was deep in his business, and I don't even know that he was at home all the time. Sometimes he was there for dinner and a hand at whist, and sometimes he was not. Everybody did as he pleased in that big house which stood within a rifle-shot of the moors. The town where old Drummond had his offices was a short hour's drive away, and once or twice I saw him start off in the morning behind a pair of roans. He was a fine whip, a fine horseman, with his trim figure and easy seat. Eve got her pluck from him, her fearless eyes.

All that week we made a playground of the

moors, rode, walked, went picnics; and we danced and play-acted, and went to bed more often late than early. It was a fine, free life they led up here, she, her brothers, her sister, and their friends. The house was full of them, coming and going, young, delightful, spending somebody else's money. It was a life! I think I reveled in it, while it lasted. Mrs. Drummond was always gracious, but the sister seemed a bit puzzled, and, I suspect, regarded me as something of a freak. For every once in a while I came out with things which, if they did n't exactly make these people's hair curl, at least made them sit up. There was Cairo, for instance, and how I 'd run a livery-stable there; and my two years as a trooper in the cavalry, and how I 'd signed the pledge to get the money to buy myself out; and a cocktail bar I 'd served at in the West and the man I beat over the head with a whisky bottle; and the *Zoë* that got piled up in the Straits when I was working a passage as cook's mate. Eve did n't care; but most women would have kicked my shins under the table and signaled to me to shut up. But she rather rejoiced in it; and all those gay young men—I 've often wondered what they thought. They were re-

spectful; but I suppose they voted me a barbarian; some sort of an outsider, at any rate, like a novelist or an explorer, or one or another of the celebrities that descended on us here and there. For, by Jove, what with Good Friday and Easter, we were a crowd! Politicians and professors and the meenister fra the kirk. And old Drummond stood them all, and even me! He did n't say much; he mostly listened, or put in a word that made us talk. And Eve was all kindness, jogging me and proud of me, and correcting me where I went wrong; for I was n't great on etiquette and sometimes tripped up over titles. "Dropping bricks," we called it. I liked it best when we took a couple of ponies and went off by ourselves. And then I could tell her more about the office, and the house, and my father and mother, and Netta and young Carey-Holt. They made her laugh; and, candidly, she did n't like them.

"But, don't you see, I 'm going to pull you out of all that," she cried, "and give you a real home and a real family! I 've spoken to Father, and he 's quite willing. And Mother likes you —said you were most attentive. I suppose you are, though I had n't noticed it."

And there was the wind playing through her great rope of hair; she let it down for me once and sat on it and coiled it up again. And here in the open she had a color and a light in her eyes and a fierce vitality that sometimes made me think of her as a young man rather than as a young woman.

"One could go anywhere with you," I said; and then we planned trips all over the world, in China and Persia and through the Southern Seas. And when we had a son we would make a great man of him. She never saw herself as the mother of girls, but the boy I remember. He was to have everything that boys *can* have —the best schools, the best clothes—the best of everything! And she's never had one—only girls.

It was all perfectly and utterly mad. But young love is like that. Once she looked up at me abruptly; and, "Why didn't you run away with me," she asked, "on that Spanish island? I would have come."

"And then?" I said.

"You would have had me then; we should have belonged to one another; and in this rotten Northern world—who knows?"

It was the first time I had ever seen her hesitate.

We sat on a boulder after that, a great rock ringed with turf and dead heather, and ate our sandwiches, and she looked out on the moors with questioning eyes.

"I ask so much of life," she said; "I ask so much. I wonder whether I 'll ever find it."

She came down out of the clouds and was kind to me—put her arm round my shoulders and her cheek to mine.

"You 're like this rock," she said; "that 's why I love you. I don't think if the worst came to the worst you 'd ever change."

I could n't follow her; but I seemed to understand her. "Thanks, kid," I said; and I don't know that I ever have changed. She has, perhaps; but, even she. . . . How many people are we? I suppose a dozen.

IX

On the Easter Saturday, Drummond put his arm through mine. "You 're coming for a walk with me this afternoon," he said; "never mind about Eve; she 'll let you off." And, right

enough, as soon as lunch was over and we 'd had our coffee and cigarettes, he was ready.

I was glad he 'd given me this opportunity. Out on the moors I could talk with more confidence, with more freedom, than in the house; and even than in the great library where he received people if he and they wanted to be alone together. It was the one room in the place that we youngsters respected.

"By the way," he began, "Eve told me you 've gone into your father's business. How do you like it?"

"I don't know that it 's a question of liking," I answered; "it 's the only way."

"Nobody works for fun, I suppose—at least, that kind of work. I could give you a job up here; but you would n't stick it."

"I 'd stick anything to make a decent income."

"I suppose you would," he answered; "and when you 'd stuck it long enough, you 'd suddenly wake up."

I was wide awake now, as we went on together, he talking as he had never talked to me before; most humanly, most kindly—more like an older brother and an equal than the chief of his great enterprises. And the clouds sailed over-

head, the wind was keen and stung the blood in us, the turf underfoot was good to walk on, and the wild hills lifted our spirits and carried them afar. The rumor of spring was in that valiant air as we strode forward. This was Eve's home, I thought to myself. No wonder that she carried herself so proudly! And next I turned and listened to her father.

"I like you, Vignolles," he had said; "that's why I'm taking all this trouble. I've spent a week trying to understand you. Eve I already know. *She* would n't stick it"; and when I turned a challenging face to him, he went on, unruffled.

"She fell in love with a hero," he pursued, "a romantic fellow she met on board a ship and rode with on islands; a careless young devil who'd taken his chances and did n't give a fig for any man. That's right, is n't it? But if you go into business, you'll lose all that. She did n't fall in love with your father's managing clerk, or one of mine."

He gave that time to soak in; he gave me time to feel the weight of it; and next, "I've been to sea myself," he said, "and I've been as hard up as you, Vignolles. I was a younger son of a

poor house—blood, but no money. I 've felt the lure of it; I 've known the world and something of its wonders. I chucked all that, just as you propose to do. I chucked it all away when I was nineteen and a bittock. You 're past thirty. You 're too old to change. I wanted to win my wife, just as you want to win Eve. And I 've won her," he continued. "I 've given her all that any man could give; she wanted those things, and I don't blame her. Perhaps I wanted them, myself. Eve 'll want them too, and more besides. Where are you going to find them?"

"She knows what she 's taking on," I answered.

"No man and no woman know what they 're taking on till the first year 's over," he said abruptly.

"And after that?" I asked.

"They begin to put questions. You 'd say, 'By Jove, is it worth it?' and Eve 'd say, 'By Jove, is it worth it?' But you 'd both go on and hide the doubt away from one another and even from yourselves. That 's what I did, and, perhaps, I found a different answer. It *was* worth it. But I 'm not like you, young Vignolles. And I 'm not like Eve. She 's had everything; she 's never been denied. I 've

spoilt my women. Perhaps we 've spoilt one another. Well, why not!" And he looked at me fiercely, just as Eve might have done, but his eyes changed of a sudden, and next we were back whence he had started.

"Yes, you might stick it; but you 'd hate it," he resumed. "I 've got over that, but you can't. I don't come from the South of France or wherever your people come from. I was born and bred in a hard country, where there is n't much sun. And you 've got some streak in your blood —some old Moor or Jew or Arab mystic? I 'm right, are n't I?"

It had never occurred to me; and even to-day there 's no evidence; but I suspect he was not far wrong. I remember I stared at him instead of answering; and then he smiled. "Too young to bother, eh, Vignolles? I wish I were!"

He went on very gently after that: "You could come up to my works to-morrow if you liked; I 'd make a place for you. But it 's not your line," he added, thoughtfully; "you 'd be unhappy; in the long run you 'd be unhappy. I 've said to Eve, 'as a friend or a lover'; we 're pretty frank with one another. But as a husband you 'd find you were caught up in a net—

trapped and bound—you 'd lose the very things that make you valuable. Most men can stand it; but you never could—the years going from you, and nothing to show for them but money. Neither knowledge nor wisdom nor truth nor beauty; but only money. And the wife you 'd married would be the symbol of it all, and you 'd get to hate her pride and her finery, for which you 'd given your best years. And the children you 'd begotten and were spending yourself over would be a burden, and all the kindness in the world would n't atone for it. . . . I 'm different. I can stand it. So can most men. But you!

"You 'd submit—you 'd knuckle under," he ran on; "but, in your heart, you 'd hate it. And Eve would ask for all that, and nothing else would satisfy her. It 's nature. It 's no good judging it or fighting it. Women are kind; but women are cruel. God made 'em so. And the women of the rich are more cruel than any."

I listened to this man, knocking the bottom out of my hopes and my illusions—or trying to —and I was n't moved. I was n't moved at all. I said as much.

"What other men have done, I can do," I

said. "Have n't I worked and answered, 'No!' Have n't I denied myself things and hung on to things—as much as most men—more than most men!"

He faced me then, and held me standing on that wind-swept moor.

"Yes, but you 've always had what you *really* wanted. You 've had the sea and the sky and the hills and the desert at noonday and a tree to rest under; and I dare say there were women who took what you could give them and asked no more than that; who wept when you left them, and laughed again and hoped anew."

He had drawn a pretty accurate picture.

"But all that 's over," I admitted.

"It 'll never be over," said he. "If you were younger, perhaps—" And then he veered. "I 'm hardened," he said; "I 'm broken to it; it 's my life. I can remember. But to-day I look out on a landscape, and I think of iron and coal; I look out on the sea, and I think of freights and shipping; I look up to the hills, and I see the quarried stone in them, and the sun and stars are nothing to me but a calendar and the seasons. And where you see the wilderness I see a railroad and traffic returns; and where you

see water I see power and wharfage—and that's all there is to it. But you, Vignolles, are different; and you 'll never change.

"If you had money you 'd spend it—give it away to some other poor devil like yourself. If you had property it 'd be an embarrassment and a tie to you. And you look out on the world, and everywhere you look you find the wealth your heart hungers for; and it is n't gold, my boy, or coal or iron, or freights or power. I suppose the minister up at the kirk could find the right word for it. . . . You may not know it," he ran on, "but you will some day, when these things clear and you have suffered to the limit. A man suffers what he can endure—no more, no less—and just now you 're tolerably happy? And you won't believe me; not to-day at any rate. In a few years' time, perhaps. Then you 'll say, 'The old fool was right.' To-day you 'll be angry with me. I don't blame you. I 'd have been angry if I 'd met myself forty years ago. . . . You 'll do as you like, in any case," he ended, "and so will Eve. But I want you to promise me one thing. You can write to her and see her as often as you like, but leave out an engagement till the pair of you

have got down to facts. I'd offer you money; I'd be glad to start you; but you're not the sort that takes money, and no more is Eve. . . . And you won't bolt with her, either, if I am any judge. You'll play the game with us, and especially with her mother. . . . That's settled now, is n't it?"

I would have promised him anything he liked, so much I loved the man. He'd judged me and he'd treated me in the only way I could understand. For, in my heart of hearts, I knew that every word he had said to me was honest.

X

There is a reaction that follows upon every loss; when, one by one, the sacred things within you fall before the world's brutality. The maid who offers herself weeps when she has been accepted; the man, hired out, is shocked when his employer robs him. And it is n't the money; it's the loss of something greater; of trust, of faith, of loyalty 'twixt man and man. I did n't know that old Drummond's words had startled me till we reached home.

Taking my bath that evening and changing for dinner in the solitude of my room, my spirits suddenly went flop. Drummond had made me pause and look upon the naked face of things; not on our hopes, but on the things that are.

Downstairs, however, we were full of guests and bustle, and Eve was acting in a burlesque melodrama that had been prepared as a lark for us. I was n't in it. They had pressed me to take a part, but I was n't needed and I 'm not an actor. So nobody saw the drop in me, and after dinner I was able to clear out. One has these moods. For an hour or two I felt like a wounded animal. I left the house and took the road that led toward the town. It was empty under a night of stars. I tramped it, walking out my pain. By ten o'clock I was in the town, and cured.

I remember I took a cigarette out of my case, and found I had no matches.

I stopped the first man in the street and asked him for a light. I had to ask him twice before I understood.

"I cannot give you a light," he had said, "but I 'll race you a mile for a shilling." He re-

peated it with the utmost gravity in the same broad Scots, of which I have given but an inadequate translation.

The genial fellow was three parts drunk and so was everybody else in that Scotch city. On a Saturday night, at this hour, I had never been in one before. But it was fantastic. I went into the best hotel to get some matches; and I seemed to be the only sober person in it. Strange men offered me drink; I was received like a conqueror. Matches, tobacco, whisky were all pressed hard upon me. It was something like that Spanish island where half the village had ridden back to the ship with us, only these good people were all filled with liquor instead of with the sun. But they showed a similar enthusiasm, the same warm heart. It was a trifle embarrassing. I escaped into the street again and walked their whisky off on my way back.

Half a moon was rising above the moors; and I was perfectly and gloriously sober when I reached the house.

"Where have you been?" cried Eve.

I told her.

"You 've missed the play!"

"I have n't missed anything or anybody," I said; and I described the man in the street, the packed hotel, and how I had evaded my captors.

It made her laugh.

Her father joined us. He was tickled, too.

"And they 'll all turn up at the kirk to-morrow, solemn as judges," he commented.

On the Sunday, I remember, Eve and her young friends taught me to ride a bicycle. I had never been on one before.

They led me up to a slope where the road ran downhill, helped me on, and set me rolling. The thing had no brakes worth mentioning and off it went with me; and everybody yelled with rapture and delight. I 'd been on a runaway horse, but this thing beat it. When it had finished, I turned it round and rode it back uphill. I don't think anything I could do or had ever done impressed these people more than that.

On the Monday I left them. My holiday was over, and next day I 'd be clerking it in Basinghall Street. Eve drove me to the station, gay as a bird, the morning glory in her hair and eyes. We had gone over much of the ground that I had traversed with her father, and there was little else to say on that score.

"No engagement and no bolting." Thus she had summarized the argument; adding in her boyish, direct way, "So that 's all right!" And when the train came in and I had said good-by to her, "We 'll be in town next month," she cried, "and we 'll do all the theaters. You must take me everywhere." It was one way of looking at life; and, "Well," as old Drummond had said, "why not!"

XI

You can imagine that London and the office and my own people seemed pretty dull after all that; and, probably, they were. Nevertheless, I was amused in certain directions. My mother began it. She was most feudally impressed.

"You 've been staying with Drummond of Drummond's—*the* Drummond?" she exclaimed. "He 's a brother of the Earl of Mull and an Honorable himself, besides having all that money!"

She knew more about it than I did. There was a paper in those days called "Modern Society": women read it, and yet were ashamed

to be seen with it. For it was n't above a touch of scandal—Victorian scandal—and these Victorian ladies were pretty easily shocked. It had a bright-pink cover, which my mother would remove with care and caution, so that none of us should detect her; and then she 'd settle down and read about the doings of the bold and great. So she knew a little of Drummond of Drummond's and his elder brother the Earl of Mull, and whom they 'd married and whom they had n't, if such a question might arise. The earl, it is true, had been rather lively, and I gathered from Eve that her father on occasion had helped him round one or two awkward corners. But now he was married to an American lady who kept a close watch on him, and to-day he was rather in the way of being a domestic pet. He purred on the hearth-rug and lapped milk out of a saucer. But my mother was n't so much interested in *him*. She wanted to hear what we 'd had for *dinner* every evening; and as there had been eight or nine of them, I found it rather difficult to remember.

"Hors d'œuvres?" she prompted me.

"Yes, there had been hors d'œuvres.

"Caviar?"

Yes, I remembered caviar and anchovies and smoked salmon.

And next she got on to soup and fish and joints and birds and things, and finished up with shaped ice-cream. She was very particular. There were the vegetables. Had they been done with butter or just plain? I did my best for her.

After that we started on the servants.

Was there a chef, she wanted to know, and, if so, was he a Frenchman?

I satisfied her on that point.

And how was the table laid?

Upon my word, I had n't noticed.

"You did n't notice!" she gasped; and it seemed for the moment as though she had sent me North to bring back a report, and here was I, returned without it!

We did better over the servants. For I remembered footmen, grooms, and girls who made the beds, and old Forbes, the butler, and the lady in the housekeeper's room, and gardeners. I 'd tipped everybody in sight and made friends with them; and these Scottish servants were infinitely more human than ours in the South. They took an interest in you; and especially in

me, who somehow they knew had come up in pursuit of Eve.

Young Carey-Holt listened and so did my sister. Carey-Holt, too, was much impressed. He did n't know, of course, what these people could "see" in me—Netta gave him away; in fact, he seemed to fancy that if they asked any of us, it ought to have been himself; for, in his own way, he was somebody, was n't he?

"I 'd like to know the two girls," said Netta.

"You probably will," said I.

"Do you think they 'd like me?"

"Could n't help 'emselves." She was a real good sort before she married that ass, Carey-Holt.

And when I 'd satisfied everybody and answered all their questions, Carey-Holt said he was going to take up riding and learn it in a school and go for a hack round Hampstead Heath of an early morning. And my mother said, "Drummond of Drummond's, and brother to the Earl of Mull. He might be the making of you. Mind you keep in with him!"

It was all very suburban and strange and queer till I came up against my father.

Curiously enough, he 'd escaped the family ambitions. I 'd never known him very intimately till then, till those few months during which I worked with him in Basinghall Street. We got on well together after the first shock. I think it was because I stood up to him.

He too had his pride, his self-respect, his notion of things; and it was n't in any way suburban. Vignolles Brothers and Company had begun in his father's day and had included two of his uncles. Both had died of yellow fever. They had founded the house at Lima, and then came the branch at Rio, and my father and his brother had removed the whole concern to London and left the two "stores" to the gentleman who had figured as "and Company." After they 'd drawn out and transferred their capital —it took them several years—they were City merchants, buying on commission for the parent house and as many new ones as they could trust with goods and credit. My uncle Fred had been in it at first; but he had caught the fever out in Panama when the French were making a mess of the canal. Not so very long ago. The canal had been rather a gold-mine to Vignolles Brothers and Company—they still stuck to the

old style, from habit. I learnt all that over again—I 'd heard most of it vaguely—chatting away at luncheon and sometimes after dinner. My father's business now was buying goods and shipping them to his clients overseas. Sometimes they paid in produce and sometimes in bills. I was always quick at the theory of any business, though not so ready with the practice.

My father, as I learnt to know him then, was rightly proud of his position. He and his brother had made it, and it was certainly one of honor. In London, in the city that knew him and respected him, he was always a buyer and never a seller; for the produce went to auction and he had no interest in praising it. It was his pride, too, to owe no man a farthing beyond the day, and all his life he had been able to maintain this. He had a horror of debt, of borrowing; and when I spoke of pawnbrokers, with the ease born of necessity, my father shuddered. It was sometimes strange to think that I was his only son.

In the City itself, he was always the merchant, at that time something of a caste, almost Brahminical. Without his tall hat, his black coat and waistcoat, he would never have dared venture

into Basinghall Street. These were the uniform, the hall-mark of his rank and place. He was a City merchant; and I think he would rather have been that than any duke; even though "Modern Society" gave them the go-by and Queen Victoria seldom favored them with her regard.

XII

Do you know, I was very happy learning that business. In the first place, I was doing it for Eve; and, taking it all in all, the thing *was* full of interest, though some of the detail and drudgery might have been left out.

My father was set upon my starting from the bottom. So I started there and did n't find it too oppressive. I splashed about with a brush and water and copied letters in a book; I endorsed and folded and pigeonholed the ones that we had answered. I ran about the City with bills of exchange and bills of lading and consular invoices and even with the mail-day post. I learnt to know the country from Ludgate Circus to the Tower, every nook and every cranny—tucked-away churches and churchyards,

museums, and halls of City companies, and Georgian and Queen Anne houses in back-waters and blind alleys. Carter, the office-boy, went with me sometimes, and always the first time. He usually made a picnic of our stroll; ate squashed dates out of a bag or cocoanut chips, or cubes of nougat bought from men with barrows—it tasted like paper; and when the strawberries came in he ought to have had a colic. He collected and dealt in foreign postage-stamps pinched off the firm's letters; he owned the half of a pair of roller-skates and performed on the asphalt; he smoked and spat equally, producing cheap cigarettes; and once he tried one of my father's unfinished cigars and had to be helped into his hat and overcoat and sent home early instead of at six P. M., when the business closed. I learnt his job; or, at least, the more serious parts of it.

Then there was Lee, the packing-clerk. He had charge of the packing-room downstairs. Most of the stuff we bought went straight from warehouse or factory to the docks, but small parcels always came to Basinghall Street—China-silk shawls and bandana handkerchiefs, uniforms for Central American generals, good

cutlery and leather articles, or personal commissions. Sometimes, acting under instructions, we swindled these South or Central American customs by putting false bottoms in the packing-cases. Lee looked after all that; and when each collection was ready he sewed up bales, or soldered the tin linings, or nailed down the lids and stenciled on the markings. At a push any of us would help the carriers and carters who called for the things and backed their horses in that cobbled yard; but it was Lee who tipped them and took receipts and wrote out advice notes. He was a serious young man with ambitions. In his leisure hours he studied Spanish; he was a teetotaler, a politician, and a chapel-goer; and I 've no doubt but that to-day he 's a prosperous man. For diversion he courted the housekeeper's daughter; they lived on the top floor, and Lee usually managed to get off and take a cup of tea with them. . . . I learnt most of *his* job.

Mr. Nairn, the bookkeeper, was the mathematician of the party. He kept all the accounts—day-book, journal, and ledger—in a wonderful handwriting that reminded me of monks and ancient missals. So far he had n't illuminated

his folios; but he might have done. His black-letter work, his figures and his capitals, were gems of art; and when he made a mistake—for even he was human—he fished out a special pen-knife and performed a surgical operation so delicate that he ought to have been employed in hospitals. Except through a microscope, you could n't see that there had been an error. His books were beautifully clear; in addition, subtraction, or carrying over he was invulnerable, and at the end of each month he produced a balance-sheet that told us exactly how we stood. Apart from these accomplishments, he was a good-looking, youngish man with dark eyes and a long, fox-colored moustache of which he was justly proud. He twirled it and he twisted it and he had a hand-mirror in his desk in case it got refractory. He wore very tight trousers, as was the fashion in those days, displaying an elegant pair of legs; and in his large flat necktie he sported a horseshoe pin the color of gold; and he had spats and fancy waistcoats and his pointed shoes were always very highly polished. When my father was out and the coast all clear, Mr. Nairn used to talk about Girls. On such occasions he did not remind me of monks and

ancient missals. Girls were his hobby; and especially the Girls of Islington, where he resided, the mainstay of a widowed mother. As long as he had his mother to keep he could n't marry. So, failing that, he had become an incorrigible hunter. . . . I learnt most of his job; and bookkeeping, if you give your mind to it, is not so difficult as it appears.

Then there was Mr. Niederer, the managing-clerk and foreign correspondent. He was a German Swiss from Zürich, which accounted for his proficiency in foreign languages. He had studied these at school; he could write business letters in six; and would easily have managed several more had they been needed. I don't know that he could speak most of them or write anything else in most of them; but for business letters and foreign invoices he was invaluable. He was a very tall man, all legs and arms, with a small, thin body, and he reminded me of a praying mantis or a grasshopper. His diversion—for we all had our diversions—was to recite yards of German poetry; Schiller, Goethe, Heine, I could recognize. He 'd sit up at his high desk on his high stool, wind his long legs about it, wave his long arms, and, in a deep

voice that was most heartrending and unexpected, he would begin. Usually, he would end up on a groan and two lines from Schiller's "Bell":

> "O, dass sie ewig gruenen bliebe
> Die schoene Zeit der Jungen Liebe!"

Which means, "Oh, that the beautiful days of young love might last forever!" I gathered that he had been jilted by a lady of his native city; and each time my eyes took in his long thin legs, his long thin arms, and narrow body, crowned with a large round head on a neck as long as a swan's, I was n't surprised. . . . I learnt most of *his* job.

I leave my father to the end.

On mail-days he sat in his office and wrote; but on most other days, after he 'd read and dealt with the morning's correspondence, he would put on his tall hat, change into his black coat, grasp his umbrella, and sally forth to buy. The "repeat" orders were dealt with in the office—one sent them out by post to the agents or the manufacturers; but when original orders came in, the customer relied on my father's judgment and experience. These never failed him; and if they

had, the customer would have been the last man to make a fuss about it. For in many ways my father's position seemed to be patriarchal, and most of his clients had a very real affection for him. Creoles, octoroons, half-castes, Spanish Jews whose ancestry had fled before the Inquisition, real Spaniards or real Portuguese,—he moved among them like a friend and very often like a father. He and his had known their parents and their grandparents, had spent long years in the tropical lands whence they were sprung, and he could speak all their languages and write all their languages far better than they could themselves. He had a gift that way, improved by study. I have it myself, but not in like degree.

With the spring, samples of these clients would arrive on almost every mail-boat; and my father took charge of them and led them round the City. At night he brought them home or carried them off to variety shows—they loved the Empire ballets and the Alhambra. Our English theaters they could not understand; but give them girls in tights and they were happy. By day they bought and placed their orders in the warehouses, lunched in the City restaurants,

and listened to my father's stories. With them he was again "Don Ricardo." His years fell from him as he sat with them; and he was back again in his early days, when he had sailed the Caribbean, crossed the Isthmus, or worked in the store at Rio. He would tell of earthquakes and niggers, and hurricanes, and a tidal wave that had driven him into the hills; he would sing songs made in a patchwork dialect, picked up in Cuba or in Martinique. From him I caught a glimpse of the real West Indies; quite different from those Islands of the Blest where I had strayed with Eve.

We got on very well together while it lasted. He was astonished at my quickness and my interest. "How did you know that?" he used to say; for, as I have already remarked, the theory of his business was as a child's play to me, who had seen so much of other and more complicated affairs. You gave your customers six months' credit and charged them six per cent. *per annum* for it; you took a commission of five per cent. upon their purchases; and your manufacturers and agents and warehousemen gave you a private rebate of two and a half or three. So you turned the bulk of your capital over twice a

year, and, allowing for bad debts, drew a dividend of about twenty per cent. on it. As my father had several times repeated, it was not a bad business. It was not by any means a bad business.

XIII

Eve and her mother and sister and one or two of the brothers did not come up to town "next month," as she had said they would. The house in Portman Square stood empty until June. I often passed it, longing and wondering; but at last Mrs. Drummond was ready and they moved South.

Through April and May there had been an interchange of letters. I wrote her all about my own affairs, which were mostly confined to what I have just told you. There was our home in St. John's Wood; there was the office; and the two little rooms that I lived in close to a terrace of shops. Not very exciting. And I was still managing with the balance of my Aunt Betty's legacy. There was a good deal of spending in that five hundred pounds—more than I had anticipated—and I suppose, also, it was

because I had turned so respectable and nearly always dined at home and often took lunch in the City with my father. I really had no expenses worth mentioning, and my only extravagance was to send Eve a row of dusky gold topazes that matched her hair and a couple of other things which I thought would suit her.

Eve was far more occupied. She had visited friends, gone racing and chasing, played in theatricals, and was now taking up lawn-tennis "seriously"; and in the summer she was off to Switzerland to climb. Would I come with them? It would be such fun!

Poor me!—poor little me! I had to stick fast to business. "That old father of yours," she wrote; "if I ever see him, I 'll wring his neck! Why does n't he make you a partner?"

I explained to her that nobody had made *him* a partner till he had *earned* that distinction, and that he took the business far more seriously than we did. I told her about his tall hat and black coat and how particular he was, and that, in all probability he would regard *her* father—a Leviathan of commerce—as of the same order as himself, but entitled, if anything, to ten black coats and ten tall hats at once.

My father actually did look upon Drummond in some such super-respectful way. Once or twice he questioned me as to my prospects in that particular direction; and in June, when the Drummonds were really come to town, and one day, after I had mentioned that I was dining with them and going on to the opera afterward, he spoke to me seriously and told me what was in his mind.

We had lunched together at the Wool Exchange place off Coleman Street, and as we sat a little over our cigars, "I 'll tell you what," he began: "you 're shaping well—far, far better than I 'd expected. If you marry Miss Drummond, you can have the business and I 'll get out. I 'll let you have my money to run it with: I 'll charge you eight per cent. for that, but the other ten or eleven will be enough to start on. Your mother and I began with less; and I dare say a girl like that 'll have money of her own. You 'd have two or three thousand a year as a beginning; that is n't so bad, is it? I don't think that Mr. Drummond himself would look upon you as a pauper; and, with more capital, the business might be extended. I think my clients would stick to you; they 'd sooner do

business with my son than go elsewhere. And I 'm growing old," he said. "I 've often felt that it was about time for me to retire. I 'd thought of selling the business—I 've had offers—but now you 're here there 'll be no need."

It all sounded very simple as he had put it; and, really, in his own peculiar way, my father was simple; perhaps more simple than he had any right to be in a pretty complex world.

I have already given you the image he had probably made of old Drummond; a replica of himself, I fancied, but very, very much enlarged. Gigantic, where he himself was merely respectable. Such figures had for him an almost religious significance. For these he had a respect, a deference, that sometimes surprised me. Of the great men in the City of London he would speak as I had been taught to speak of prophets, priests, and kings, though I don't know that he ever took any of *these* very seriously. Yet a merchant prince, a great banker, would be a manifestation of genius that roused him to the depths. And of Eve herself, so far but a shadow to him, he stood in something the same kind of awe. She might be of the like species as my sister, but so magnified as to be hardly

recognizable; and I dare say he credited her with a due sense of her enormous responsibilities, her amazing opportunities; saw her rather starched and inaccessible, surrounded with her father's dignity, his great position, and all those rich accessories which are the material expression of so much power. Deep within him, I 've no doubt that he was rather moved and shaken, even by the bare idea that a son of his might marry into such a stable. It was this emotion which had made him speak and now review my present and my past more leniently and even with some indulgence and some weakening. For, at that stage, he would not have minded my taking liberties and even absenting myself for hours at a time from Basinghall Street, did such a course harmonize with a more thorough prosecution of my courtship and help me to the winning of a daughter of the house of Drummond.

XIV

I took no liberties, however; indeed, I was rather strong on that point. Even with Eve in town and showering messages and invitations, I had the courage to say, "No." It was my in-

tention to play the game with my own father as well as with hers. She said I was an ass to show so much consideration; but there it was. Still, I did manage, one way or another, to see a good deal of the Drummonds, and, incidentally, of a side of London life that I had missed before. It made sad holes in the balance of my five hundred pounds; but it was worth it.

We had a row or two because I would n't chuck the office on a week-day, not even for Eton and Harrow, or Henley, or a day's racing at Ascot; and once or twice because I would n't sit up more than half the night. I had to be at my work by nine o'clock each morning, and sometimes at one or two I stole away and went to bed. I could n't "sit out" on balconies till daybreak at people's dances and keep my end up at the office as well. And then there were my clothes. Clothes were a very important matter in her world. They were less so in mine. She showed no desire to make the acquaintance of my people; nor did I press her. Once on a Saturday we passed my mother and sister driving in the Park —they often hired a carriage to see the show— and Eve was merely curious about them.

"But don't you see I want to get you away

from all of that?" she explained. "Why don't you go in for politics or something decent?"

This made me laugh; for, as you may imagine, I was never very much attracted by that game.

At the house, Mrs. Drummond smiled her invariable, benignant smile upon us, indulgent, kindly, gracious. There was the sister who regarded me as a curiosity and the brothers who had their own friends and their own time: they seemed able to do what they liked in it, and I imagine old Drummond was glad they stayed away. They would n't have been much use to him, in any case, and he had no sentiment on that subject. Him I never saw in London. He put down his money and stayed up in the North. With July over, Eve went out to Switzerland to "climb," and it had been agreed that on her return something definite might be said about our engagement. My mother had already departed to one of her foreign watering-places, taking my sister with her, and my father and I were left to ourselves in town.

"You 'd better come and live at the house," he said, "and it 's about time I paid you something for your trouble."

We did n't quarrel over that; and as the

various clerks went on their holidays, a fortnight at a time, we were drawn pretty closely together, I doing all kinds of jobs—Mr. Niederer's and Mr. Nairn's, and even Lee's work down below in the packing-room. It made me in a mess, but one of us had to do it.

Eve found me there one day in early September when my father was out. She had just returned, looking brown and bonnie. She was passing through London and she had taken a hansom-cab to Basinghall Street. She wanted to speak to me very, very seriously.

"All right," said I, and led the way upstairs.

Mr. Niederer, Mr. Nairn, and the boy Carter were in the clerks' office. She gave them a look of disapproval.

"What do they talk about—the price of mutton?" she asked.

"Nothing so common," I answered, with a grin. "Mr. Niederer talks about German poetry—Goethe, Heine, Schiller; Mr. Nairn discusses Girls; and the boy goes on walking-tours and has picnics in the streets. He 's rather a good performer on one roller-skate."

"They don't look like it," she said.

We were in the little room between the outer

office and my father's room. It contained the desk I now occupied, a cabinet full of pigeon-holes where letters were stored away, and a couple of iron safes in which at six o'clock we locked up the firm's books and bills of exchange or any other valuables.

On my desk was a letter I had written in Spanish.

She paused there after I had told her that that was my place; and, *"Muy Señor mio y amigo,"* she read aloud. "What does that mean?"

I told her. "'Dear Sir and friend,'" I translated it, "and we always end with kissing their hands," I added.

"Do you write that?" she asked.

"Among other things."

In my father's room I gave her the best chair. It was the one that clients used, while he remained seated at his roll-top desk. I took his place, sitting down in my shirt-sleeves as I was and a trifle grimy.

She looked round the room.

"He 's got a nice carpet," she said; and then she rose to inspect the pictures that hung upon the walls.

These included two colored lithographs sent us by the steamship companies and three large faded photographs that had been here since the beginning. There was the big one in three pieces showing Rio harbor, and the two smaller ones with members of my family grouped outside the Lima and the Rio stores.

"Shops?" she said; "I did n't know you were shopkeepers."

I pointed out my father, a beardless young man in a white duck suit, and my uncle and my grandfather and great-uncles—two of them had held some consular office as well. And there were clerks and colored people beside them, and the white glare of the house and the strong shadows, all faded; but I could see them in the mind's eye as we stood together.

"Humph," she said, not with any great enthusiasm.

Next she examined the stand that usually held my father's hats and coats and umbrellas. A panama hat and an alpaca jacket hung from it this morning; for in the summer he always came to the office in a panama hat which he put on again before leaving, and he did his work in the alpaca jacket and not in his wide black coat.

There were some samples of rice on a table and of Swiss embroideries and Nottingham laces and a couple of steel machetes.

"Is this what you sell?" she asked.

"It 's what we buy," I answered; "the people out there sell it."

"My God, what a life!" she cried, and went back to her chair.

XV

In that old paneled room, the woodwork on its walls disguised with paint, we sat, I at my father's desk and she on her chair, and talked. The room had the faint smell of very old rooms in very old houses; its windows overlooked the courtyard and the windows of neighboring offices. There was not much sunlight here, nor very much air.

Eve looked a ridiculously fashionable young person, sitting there in a city office, a cigarette stuck in her mouth; and I suppose she was powdered a little and was n't above displaying a very neat ankle. I wondered what Mr. Niederer thought and Mr. Nairn, who was so strong on Girls.

"I 've come up about our engagement," she began; "I 've been thinking it over."

I waited for her to continue, though first I rose and closed the door. I did n't shut it quite, but almost. We were more alone now.

"I 've tried to stand all this," she pursued, "but I don't think we 'd be happy. You don't really like this work, do you?"

"It 's not a question of liking," I replied, "is it?"

"And you won't bolt?"

"No, I won't bolt," I answered.

"Father could give you a job."

"It 'd be very much like this one."

"So we 're cornered," said she; and then quite passionately, "I won't be the wife of any one like this: I 've made up my mind!"

Now, that was rather a blow; and there was no answer to it.

"As you like," I said, rising.

"Then it 's over!" she cried.

"That 's for you to say."

"Well, I 've said it."

"You don't think I 've enjoyed this, exactly—sitting here from nine till six—do you?" I replied.

"Why should you go on?" she answered. "When we first met you were a man," she continued; "now—" and she looked the rest at me. It was quite enough. "Say you 're glad," she pursued. "In your heart of hearts you must be glad!"

And, by Jove, I was! For there were two things going on inside me, the desire for her and the desire for my lost freedom.

"I know you are!" she cried. "What 's the use of pretending?"

"Well, in some ways," I admitted.

"Then we 're both glad! Let 's be brave and finish with it," she added. "I could n't stick it. I would, Fred, if I could!"

She was just a trifle beyond herself; or, shall we call it a trifle hysterical? For, after that, she rose too and faced me; and then she took my head between her hands and kissed me and kissed me once more and held me to her breast as though her heart would break.

She shook herself free at last, picked up her cigarette, and, after that, she laughed.

"I 'm all right now," she cried; and, like the boy she was, "Tuck in your tuppenny!" she yelled, meaning that I should "make a back"

for her. I did; and, light as a feather, she vaulted over.

"Now you!" she cried, and next it was my turn; and there we were, playing leap-frog round that confounded office, when my father came in and caught us.

His face—his dear old face!

He was in his tall hat, his black coat, and holding his silk umbrella. I was in my shirt-sleeves and a trifle grimy, and Eve had her hat at the back of her head and half a cigarette stuck in the corner of her mouth— But there stood my father.

"Miss Drummond—" I began. But he never believed me.

"What right," he spluttered, "what right have you to bring your girls up here! If you want to see your girls, you see them outside!"

This was too much for Eve.

She glared at him.

But that made him all the worse.

He turned on his heel. "I 'll be back in ten minutes," he cried, "and if she is n't gone by then I 'll fetch the police." And, with that, he left us.

"By Jove!" cried Eve. It was a different re-

ception from what she had expected. "Is that man your father?"

"Rather!" said I. "And you 've done it—put the kybosh on—he 'll never believe me. *You* were jumping when he came in. A Miss Drummond—daughter of *the* Drummond—of Drummond's! Do you think he 'd believe that of *you!*"

She put her hat straight, threw her cigarette away, and asked me to take her downstairs to her hansom. It was still waiting in the yard.

"Friends?" she said at the last.

"Of course, kid," said I; and she drove off and I stood in the archway and watched her. So did my father.

He passed me and went through the yard and into the packing-room.

I followed.

"That *was* Miss Drummond—" I began.

"You seem to think I 'm a damned fool," he answered slowly; and to the end of his days he never believed me.

Miss Drummond, to him, was always a correct young person with a chaperon. Nothing could ever change that belief and nothing ever did.

And Eve, the real Eve, whom he had seen upstairs, flushed, playing leap-frog, her hat at the back of her head, and a cigarette stuck in the corner of her mouth, was just my "girl."

XVI

I did n't feel like rows or any further explanations; at least, not for the present. So I finished what I had to do, and when I 'd cleaned up I put on my hat and said good-by to Basinghall Street. I knew it was over, that everything I 'd hoped and planned in this direction was finished and done with. I had a premonition; and when I reached home that evening—I had dined by myself in a Soho restaurant—my father settled that question for good and all.

I found him waiting up for me when I came in.

"All this story you 've told us about a Miss Drummond and you marrying her is a pack of lies," he began; "I always thought it was, from the very first. As though the father of a girl like that would let her marry a rogue like you!"

"You need n't worry your head on that score," I answered. "Good-night, Guv'nor."

left him standing there and went up to my room. I did n't sleep much all that night; one never does on these occasions.

Next morning I packed my kit and went back to the little bedroom and sitting-room I had occupied in the house close to a terrace of shops. I was done with my family, done with everybody.

The servant girls seemed sorry for me and to know that there had been a row. My father was never very reticent on these occasions. I left a note for my sister—she and my mother were due back in a few days—and meanwhile I was free to do as I pleased in London. It 's not a bad place to loaf in for a week. I filled my time quite pleasantly and very much like a foreign tourist; till Netta came round to my rooms in the early half of one morning, looking serious and sisterly and not quite sure.

"What *have* you done?" she asked, as soon as the woman of the house had gone out and left us. "Father 's making a mystery of it—something shocking and horrible—and mother 's on his side. And Bob—" this was young Carey-Holt— "does n't seem to think that you 've quite played the game."

"As far as I can see, I 'm about the only one who *has* played it," I answered dryly; and then I told her everything, from the beginning right down to the end, and finishing with, "The Guv'-nor won't believe it; but how could you expect him to?"

"It is difficult to believe," she reflected; and then, "*Are* they like that—fast and false and heartless—girls who are *really* in society?"

"They 've got a different way of looking at life; I suppose that explains it."

"But then she ought n't to have begun it," answered Netta, seriously.

"Out there—on a ship—it 's different from England. That 's the whole point of it."

She had no answer to this; and I dare say it was a bit outside her range.

"Oh, I forgot," she said; "this came for you yesterday. It 's one of the reasons why I 've come round"; and she held out a small square package. It was addressed in Eve's large schoolboy hand.

I broke the seals and opened it. She had packed it very carefully, and it had come by registered post from Scotland.

There was a note in an envelop:

I've burnt your letters; burn mine, and if you like you can keep the photographs. I'm keeping yours. Here are your presents. It 's usual to send them back. What fools we are!

EVE.

I thought Netta might care to see that, so I passed it across. And next I opened the case that held the dark-gold topazes which matched her hair. These were intact; but with them she had placed a second little note, like a motto in a Christmas cracker:

> Unlike we are, unlike, O princely Heart!
> Unlike our uses and our destinies.

That was all. It struck me then that she was rather overdoing it, and even a bit theatrical. I put the paper aside and handed the case to Netta.

"Do you want these?" I asked.

She looked at them, was even attracted by them; but, "They 're no use to me," she said; "I 'm not that color."

"Why not take 'em back to the jeweler's and swap them for something else?"

"I 'll do that," she said; and off we went together.

We lunched and had a gay afternoon. She was uncommonly decent; and when I took her

back to the house, "It 's no good coming in," she said. "Mother 's against you; she 'd believe anything, provided Father shouted. And he 's been shouting. I suppose because he knows he 's in the wrong."

I said good-by to her there; and next time we came together she was Mrs. Carey-Holt and had a baby. These rather changed her. She was a decent kid.

I went down to the bank next day, drew the balance of my five hundred pounds—it was more like five than a hundred—and then I wandered off to the docks and found a Dane I knew. He had a cargo-boat, the *Perm,* and its next trip was through the Kiel Canal to Russia. This was good enough.

Before I joined him I had a day or two to go, and I remember I looked in at the Zoo one afternoon, and somehow, I drifted off and found my friend the bison.

He was there, mangy as usual, alone, neglected, and something very like me.

I bought a bag of buns and handed them through to him.

He seemed surprised at this attention.

"Good-by, bison," I said. "I 'm off now. The

world has n't much use for us, has it?" And as he chewed and grunted, "We were too strong, too primitive, too simple," I said; "and Eve's father and that fellow on the ship who 'd been smashed up were right. Eh, boy? And that 's the long and the short of it."

XVII

Vignolles was finished. I remember then that I looked up, expecting more from him; for I had n't quite realized that he was finished. And when no more came:

"Eve Damer—she 's your Eve Drummond?" I asked.

"Yes, she married Damer, who 's in politics. She 's got what she really wanted; and she 's made him go a pretty long way. I 've bumped into them once or twice, and she 's always cordial. I 'm no use to her. But—women! Yes, that 's Eve Damer right enough. I wonder why she keeps it up."

BEHIND THE LINES

BEHIND THE LINES

WE had been talking about the war and had found it rather a mild and soothing topic after the unrests and the discontents of peace. For what with strikes and lockouts and the threat of both, and Ireland, Russia, and India, and France and Germany and Turkey, all simmering or in active eruption, we seemed to be ever so much more unsettled than we had been and there looked to be no end to it. And so we had turned back for a moment to dwell out there again, amid those four strained years that are so difficult of obliteration.

It was my friend Vignolles who began it.

"Do you know," he had asked, "there are people who almost go down on their knees and beg you to tell them something hair-raising? It 's the civilians, of course, who have n't been out. They want to hear stories that 'll make their flesh creep. They almost implore you to lie to them, and I 've no doubt a good many fel-

lows oblige. But modern war—what is it? Mechanics! A man ten miles away, who 's never seen you and does n't know you, lets off a gun, and it blows you into small pieces. That 's all the fun he gets out of it, and most times he does n't know whether he 's hit anybody or not. Or you squirm on your belly in the mud and a chap up in the air drops bombs on you, and you 're stiff with funk and he 's not specially enjoying it. He dumps down his load and goes home. Or, once in a blue moon, you may be able to empty your revolver into a man or two who 's trying to bayonet you. Nobody 's very sane in those moments, and I grant it 's exciting. But you finish with it, and it evaporates. It 's a kind of debauch. You were drunken and glorious, and now you 're sober."

"What about the generals?" I put in here. "They get a good deal of sustained excitement. Foch must have had months of it, and so must Ludendorff."

"One man in a million; that 's not much to go round. But if you want drama, true drama," he went on placidly, "sustained and covering months and weeks, it 's among the men behind the lines that you must look for it; among the

Staff people, the Supply people, the Intelligence people. They've got the time and the opportunity. They carry on more or less as people do at home. They go to their office in the morning and leave again at sunset. They've the time for drama, for histories, for all the excitements that the fighting soldier has to do without."

I remember the contentment of that afternoon. Vignolles was leaving England in a day or two. He was going back to the hot and steamy place, down in the Malays, where before the war he had grown rubber and thought to stay for many a long year. So, more or less, it was a day of parting, and we two had decided to spend it outdoors, amid the English country-side that Vignolles loved so well, but had never made his own.

We had caught an early train that took us to Oxted Junction and then we had tramped from Surrey over the Kentish border, eating our sandwiches in the open and anchoring at last on a high spot, green and lonely and pied with flowers —it may have been in somebody's park or just outside. We lay stretched in the sun till the rabbits grew used to us, till the cock pheasants strutted by and a cuckoo struck his notes on a

branch above our heads. Far away in the valley ran a thin ribbon of water, and beyond it the blue dimness of the hills. It was a perfect hour, a perfect landscape; the freshness and surprise of spring were not yet over. Nor was I astonished when Vignolles, starting up and looking around us, exclaimed, "All said and done, England 's about the best place in the world!"

"Then why don't you stop here?" I asked at that.

"No room for me here; there never was." And then, explaining himself: "It 's all right if you 've money or get in with the people who 'll push you if you do as you 're told; or you may be an unscrupulous rascal till you 're forty and spend the rest of your life covering it up. But people like me have to get out of it—too much of a crowd. Still, it 's a fine country, the very best. Ridiculous having that war and cutting down half the trees. Look at them; naked, numbered, and ready to be dragged away."

Over the near fence were a good many trunks that had lately been cut down and trimmed for the sawmills. Still, there were plenty left that had n't been touched.

"I 've always thought the German a damned

fool," my friend resumed. "If he 'd had any sense he 'd have squared France; given her back Alsace-Lorraine, shaken hands with her, and won her confidence. Then he could have walked into Russia with nobody to disturb him; helped himself to chunks of it, as much as he wanted. All the Baltic part was half German already, and it had actually been German. He could have begun on that. Worth six Alsace-Lorraines. And then I don't know that if he 'd wanted colonies in the tropics there would have been anything very serious to stop him collaring a slice of South America. There 'd have been the Monroe Doctrine and little else if he 'd played his cards well. He 'd friends everywhere. He 'd friends with us of a sort, chaps who were out to help him, though I don't suppose that was the way they looked at it. Those fellows behind the lines—I ran into a nest of them. You remember—or did n't I tell you?—I got sent to hospital early in nineteen-fifteen. I was in France then, with a mounted regiment. We were exercising the horses and something must have happened. I remember exercising the horses, and next I remember waking up in hospital and wondering how the deuce I 'd got there.

"'You 've taken a toss,' said the sister, 'and now you must keep quiet.'

"I knew I had n't been thrown and I wondered how it had come about. My head hurt, and the doctors looked into the pupils of my eyes, and felt my skull to see whether there was any fracture. There was a dead blank between going out with the horses and waking up in hospital. Concussion 's like that, and I had more than was pleasant. It feels like neuralgia down both sides of your brain and aches like blazes. Crowe, one of our officers, came in next day and told me what had happened. A long-range gun had dropped a shell among us and I 'd been blown off or thrown. The poor old horse had been more damaged than I. It took me three months to get over it, and then I was only fit for light duty.

"'We 're sending you down to the Army Service Corps,' said the depot chief where I 'd reported; 'till you 're right again. You 'll be in a base and they won't overwork you.' And that 's how I got right among the people who live behind the lines.

"The Army Service Corps had always been a bit of a mystery to me before that. I discovered

how it dealt primarily with supply and transport; so that you might be a gay young fellow riding along with a string of wagons, or you might be stuck in a grocery stall for the duration of the war; or you might be out with a division or a brigade and have to answer for their meals and forage, or you might be in charge of a row of three-ton lorries and have a car so as to run round with them; or you might be given the wheeled part of a field ambulance, or you might be dishing out frozen meat from a cold-storage depot. Very versatile, is n't it? And that 's not the half of its versatility, either.

"Down at the base, of course, we were n't particularly heroic, and most of our work was unloading supplies off steamers and stacking them and sending 'em up the line by rail. I was n't wanted for that job. I was n't wanted much for anything, it seemed, and every morning I went down to the supply depot, reported to the adjutant, and he smiled and said, 'You just play about.' So off I 'd go to the sea-front and have a bathe and talk to French families on the beach and try to keep out of mischief till bedtime. It was a fair-sized town, with a good harbor and business going on and summer

visitors who 'd come for the sea-bathing, though most of these were refugees and people who 'd been driven out from the places overrun by the Germans. I lived at a hotel, full of staff officers, and was in clover, and the tariff was fixed by the army, so it came cheap.

"One morning the adjutant said, 'You 've got a French name, have n't you? Can you speak French?'

" 'About as well as English.'

" 'I thought so,' said he; 'just come along to the colonel.'

"He led me into another office, and there I was introduced to the head of the supply depot, a tired man, obviously overworked, perhaps a bit too old for his job, or perhaps gone soft from many years of peace soldiering.

"He asked me a few questions about myself and seemed satisfied.

" 'Major Colgate, who does the local purchase,' he said, 'has got to go under an operation. He 'll show you the work and then you can carry on till he comes back.' And with that he returned to his papers and we two saluted and went out again.

" 'You 'll see an office marked "Local Purchase"

on one of the quays,' said the adjutant; 'you 'll find Colgate there. It 's rather a nice job.'

"Major Colgate was expecting me. He was a large, florid man with a breezy manner, and not much troubled, apparently, by his impending operation or by its cause.

" 'All you 've got to do,' he said, 'is to let the office run itself, and sign papers. Corporal Cliffe knows all about things; you leave it to him and you can't go wrong. And if you 're asked for something fresh, there 's the interpreter. Audibert 'll always find a good man for you and do the bargaining. I 'll take you round to the bank and introduce you. There won't be many checks to sign and I 'll be out and about again before you can turn round. There 's nothing in it really if you 're used to big business. And there 's a car. You 'll have a car.'

"We took the car and drove to the bank and I gave them my signature and found I had a credit balance of a good many thousand francs. 'When this is gone, you put in to the base cashier for more,' said Colgate, 'and let him have the receipts. But Cliffe 'll do all that. You 've only got to sign for it.'

"Next we went to the fish-market and ordered

fish, and to a fruiterer's and ordered fruit, and to a butcher's and ordered veal, and to a wine-merchant's and ordered wine. 'It's for the hospitals,' he explained, 'what I call the retail trade. They send us a list, and we do that first thing every morning. Those oysters we ordered —they're for a general. Mind you give him what he wants. It pays to look after 'em.'

"He kept on explaining as we went; and when we got back to the office, 'This base feeds and maintains its share of the Expeditionary Force,' he ended. 'All the things that can't be supplied from home or which are best dealt with locally come to us. It's our business to find the stuff. That's why we're called Local Purchase. Simple as A B C. Corporal Cliffe knows all about it. Don't you, Cliffe? Now I'd best be off. We'll drive to the hospital.'

"I went along with him and on the road he told me what an important fellow he was at home. 'A big employer of labor,' he said, 'but of course I joined up. Can't ask other men to join if you funk it yourself, can you?' He laughed at his major's pay. Before the war he was making as many pounds as he was making shillings—or was it pence?—to-day; and he asked

me about my own modest affairs and intimated that if I came to him later on, when things were peaceful, he might be able to find a place for me. I was only a second lieutenant, and he looked at me condescendingly. I suppose his own rank went with the job and had n't much to do with the individual. 'So this is the kind of thing that grows in a base,' thought I, and I gave him an extra good salute when he departed. I was glad I had n't got to work with him. I could n't have stood it for very long.

"I went back to the hotel for lunch after that and told the car to fetch me at two-thirty.

"There was nothing much to do in the office of an afternoon and I yawned and signed a few papers. Corporal Cliffe seemed busy with a long letter home; there was a private who entered figures in a book and kept accounts; and Monsieur Audibert, the interpreter, looked in and asked for money. It was he who went round and paid the small bills we owed. 'You see, I get a commission,' he said; 'it is the custom of the country.'

"I knew that to be the case and could offer no objection.

" 'The corporal and I divide it,' he added ge-

nially, when Cliffe produced a cigar-box full of notes and handed some over.

"The private looked on and said nothing.

"No more did I. I knew it was contrary to King's Regulations for anybody below commissioned rank to handle money, and quite rightly. It protects the man and makes the officer responsible. But if the major liked to chance it, that was his lookout. I left about tea-time and went into the town. Cliffe said I would n't be wanted and if anything special required signing, he 'd send it down to my hotel. But it was highly unlikely. I walked back feeling rather pleased at being some use in the world again, and next morning I turned up early, prepared to deal with what the major had called the 'retail trade.'

"This did n't amount to much, though it gave us a lot of trouble. Sick men have strange fancies, and when their rank is high enough the hospital does its best for them. There was that general who was always calling for wild birds and oysters, and the birds were difficult to come by. I often felt like sending him a ten-franc note and asking him to pass the job on to his servant.

"The really serious business of that office, however, lay in getting fresh vegetables for the troops, bran for the horses, and yeast for the bakeries. We used up quantities of these, and France just then had enough and to spare for everybody. They 're a nation of market-gardeners, and there were lots of millers with bran, and the yeast came from the distilleries. Every base had its own area and we were not allowed to poach on each other's preserves. Still, we were given a large slice of country, and having a car one could get about quite comfortably. And in the office I found that everything was pretty well cut and dried and it would be simple to carry on with the contractors and people Major Colgate had left to us. So that when I'd done with the hospitals and the unexpected things that cropped up now and again I could take life fairly easy. I enjoyed running round the coast or exploring the country in the car and it was n't difficult to find excuses. After a battle —there was the one at Loos, for instance—the hospitals cried for thousands of oranges. I crossed my whole territory looking for them, paid in cash, and loaded them up where I found them. The dealers rather held me up over that

and made us pay through the nose. But no one questioned me. Our tradition was to trust people, and the main thing was that the stuff should be on hand when it was wanted.

"So there I was, carrying on under the guidance of my little staff, the corporal full of precedent, the interpreter not much occupied, the private keeping the books and looking after the accounts. In that huge supply depot we formed a tiny island, a very peaceful spot. Sometimes I wandered round and marveled at its industry; saw the ships unloading at the quays, saw the mountains of bully-beef and jam and biscuits that were stacked in the hangars, the cases of tea and bacon, the bags of flour and sugar and salt, the sacks of oats and barley and the bales of hay, and my own bran that arrived here. I 'd wander among the fuel, and the petrol and lubricating-oils, or into the carefully guarded 'cage' where they kept 'medical comforts,' stout and ale, champagne and arrowroot, port and brandy and tinned chicken. Or through the Indian section, with its rice and strange odors. The men who worked among these things led a rather monotonous life, dishing out the same stuff day by day, or loading up trains with it and despatching

them and standing about on those weather-swept quays by the hour. It was n't heroic, but it was dashed hard work. I can't say that I envied them. But they rather envied me, with my freedom and my car and little office. I still had my comfortable quarters at the hotel, my headaches were gone, and I was fit and hearty. It was pleasant to be of some use again, and everything seemed to be going swimmingly and without much effort.

"At the end of each week we got sheets from the other bases giving the prices they were paying in their area, and the private who never said much got out one of our own and placed it on my desk for signature. The first week they came separately. But the second week the private waited. I suppose he waited; for when the corporal had gone out, he placed them on my desk together. It was almost an invitation to make comparisons and I began idly, till after a while it struck me that we were paying more dearly than anybody else.

"The corporal came back and I mentioned it and he threw a look at the private.

" 'I would n't trouble about these, sir,' he said, 'it 's quite all right'; and when I asked for rea-

sons, 'This is a dear district,' he answered. 'They 've got us here. Major Colgate always says so. Not enough competition. And, of course, it 's the quantities that make the price. They don't tell us the quantities.'

"It might easily be true and one knew what these contractors and people were, all out to rob and make the most of their opportunity; still, I did n't quite see why vegetables should cost from fifteen to twenty per cent. more here than a few miles away, though they might have one over yeast and things like that, for instance.

"I ran into the adjutant in the depot that day and mentioned it to him casually.

" 'I should n't be surprised,' he answered; and then he gave me his views about Major Colgate. They were n't exactly complimentary; and adjutants are pretty careful as a rule. But this one let himself go.

" 'Says he 's got no end of money—a big employer of labor—bought and sold things all his life, and no one's ever heard of him. The colonel believes him; I don't. He 's what I call an opportunist. Strikes me he was out of a job and living on his wits when the war came.'

"No doubt Colgate was the type that might

impose upon a certain kind of regular soldier. In the civilian world they are often pretty helpless; and I dare say the colonel had listened to this man and had accepted his pretensions, believing him to be a wealthy fellow whom one could trust, used to commerce, and quite capable of holding his own with a handful of French contractors.

"Now, I had n't meant to take that job very seriously; I was only a stop-gap and my heart was up the line. But once I started to doubt, I became a regular Sherlock Holmes. I could n't get away from the meaning of those figures, and there was Cliffe handling the petty cash as though he owned it and obstructing me in his obliging and probably artful way, and Monsieur Audibert, the interpreter, taking his commission on the small things, and possibly on the large as well, and the private who said nothing and looked nothing, but who I fancied now was watching me, as much as to say, 'Are you going to be in it as well, or are you going to keep out of it?' He himself was keeping out of it, I imagined.

"When once you begin to suspect things, you see certain other things in a new light. At one

of the cafés in the place I had struck up an acquaintance with a couple of local gentlemen; business men, I supposed they were, and in a fairly big way. To these I had mentioned that I was attached to the *Intendance,* as they call it, and was buying supplies locally for the British Army. They had not said anything, but they had exchanged glances. I remembered those glances now. And that evening I again visited the café where I had found them and one of them was in his place.

"'I want you to be frank with me,' I said, after an opening round of conversation.

"'In what respect?'

"'The *Intendance* of the British Army—what sort of a reputation has it in this town?'

"'You really want to know?'

"'Yes; I very much want to know.'

"'Well, I will tell you. When Major Baker was here it stood very high and was very competent; but the last six months with Major Colgate—we do not understand it. Or one can only suspect. It is difficult for honest people to deal with them. It is often so in our own army. I am not interested myself, but I have friends.'

"'Thank you,' I answered. It was enough. 'And may I exchange cards with you?' I added.

"'Certainly,' said he.

"I 'm afraid my card was nothing better than an addressed envelop.

"'"Vignolles," you are French?' he asked, reading my name.

"'On my father's side and distantly.'

"That had aroused his interest.

"'If I want the names of the best firms here for certain articles, could you give them to me?' I asked.

"'I think so,' said he. 'I know several who did business with Major Baker.'

"'Well, perhaps in a day or two I shall pay you a visit'; and with that I changed the subject.

"Next day I went out in the car and called on our existing people. I had never met these except at the office when they came in for their money, and me they were rather apt to ignore, asking for Cliffe or the French interpreter.

"I began with our bran-contractor, who also delivered some of our vegetables. I found her —she was a tall and rather good-looking widow —in a back street where she had a small shop with a sign that announced her as a dealer in

thread, wools, and sewing-cottons. This puzzled me a little; but what puzzled me more was when I discovered that the bearded man who sold us yeast was by profession a piano-tuner and repairer. The vegetable men, though they grew nothing themselves, really seemed to deal in vegetables. To each of these I suggested that they were making us pay too heavily. I mentioned the prices charged in other districts and said that, unless they met us, we would have to make a change.

"'The major has never complained; but I will see what can be done,' said the piano-tuner, sulkily. The widow was more loquacious and offered me a green liqueur and told me what trouble she had taken to get the enormous quantities we required and the capital that was necessary. She had called on every miller in the district; the major and the interpreter had come with her in the car. She was an eloquent woman. The vegetable men said that with poorer qualities they could make lower prices. From these I went to the man who supplied us with live sheep on the hoof for the Indian troops, who do their own killing. I could n't find him

and had to give him up. I wrote to him from the office.

"The next day I sought out my French acquaintance of the café and got him to give me a list of good addresses. It was he who told me that the piano-tuner was married to our interpreter's sister. The driver of the car had now become interested and I found him conferring with Corporal Cliffe, who had been conferring with the standing contractors I had visited the day before. The interpreter, too, had seen them; and I now learnt that prices had recently come down and that they were all willing to make reductions.

" 'Till Colgate comes back,' I thought to myself; but aloud I said, 'Well, that is good.'

"The next day I called on some of the people whose names had been given me by my French acquaintance.

"I started with a real yeast merchant who was not a piano-tuner, a young fellow who had lost an arm early in the war and who was very bitter.

" 'When Major Baker was here, he dealt with me; but now this Major Colgate has changed

it,' he cried. 'He goes to a dirty civilian, an *embusqué;* it is for this that one loses an arm!'

"His price had been satisfactory. We were paying twenty per cent. more than he had charged and he was still ready to supply us on the old terms. 'When Major Baker was here,' he repeated; 'that was a man! What must one think of the English when they treat a soldier who has done his duty in this fashion?' He was an excitable chap, and he had cause to be.

"At the largest vegetable-grower's of the district, a Monsieur Popinot, by an odd coincidence I found Major Baker himself.

" 'Excuse he,' he said, 'if I 'm poaching on your territory, but you seem to have no use for Popinot, and as I 'm buying for the next district, I thought it a pity to waste him. I don't quite understand it. Popinot showed me a letter written by your Major Colgate giving him notice. He said he could buy better and cheaper elsewhere. He can't. I 'll guarantee that.'

"I wondered whether Popinot still had the letter and whether he would lend it me or let me take a copy. He was willing enough. He did n't care. He was a rough man in a blouse, one of those French peasants who are worth

thousands and whose heart is in their gardens and the work they do outdoors.

"We found the original letter and he made me a present of it; and then I asked Baker, who seemed one of the best, whether he had really dealt with the yeast merchant who had lost an arm. He had. 'A very brave fellow, and straight and reliable,' he said; 'you don't mean to say you 've chucked him?'

"I did mean to say it.

" 'And what are you paying?'

"I told him, and how the piano-tuner who was also a yeast merchant and Monsieur Audibert's brother-in-law had come to terms.

" 'Looks a bit queer. But it 's none of my business. Audibert 's a curiosity; seems to think the war 's on for his special benefit. He 'd be in the infantry if we had no use for him. I used to threaten him. It kept him quiet'; and Baker rose and made for his car that stood with mine outside. 'I 'll go on poaching,' he cried as he drove off.

"I went back to the one-armed yeast merchant after that and asked him if he too had received a letter from Major Colgate saying that the British Army could buy more cheaply elsewhere.

He had, and he had preserved it. I made a copy and thanked him.

"It was the same with the bran; it was the same with the live-sheep dealer. Colgate had written himself down a liar if nothing worse. He was probably at the back of the widow, at the back of the piano-tuner, and was no doubt standing in with everybody else. We were paying fifteen to twenty per cent. above the market rates for practically everything we touched. Our yearly turnover was close upon two hundred thousand pounds. Joffre, French, and the Kaiser together were n't doing as well out of the war as Major Colgate, though they had a trifle more responsibility. I was rather in a rage when I got back to the office and found the corporal and the interpreter in consultation; and the corporal had n't improved matters by forging my name to a voucher which said that we had received so much clover from somebody. He 'had often done the same for Major Colgate,' he prevaricated. 'It saved trouble.'

"With the exception of the private, they were disturbed and rattled. They had lost their nerve somewhat, and one of them went out to interview the driver of the car as soon as we

returned. They wanted to know where I had been and what I was up to. They felt that they could n't last much longer if the major did n't come back and chase me away. It was exactly like living in a wild detective story where every one is a liar and trying to throw you off the scent. And when I had done with the corporal and Audibert, I turned to the private and we looked up the prices we were paying for yeast, bran, and vegetables at the time the major's letters had been written, when he had stood the old contractors off and taken the new ones on. We found the date and the prices. The old contractors were ever so much cheaper than the new and the yeast was exactly the same yeast with the same trade-mark; and Popinot could hardly be beaten for potatoes, carrots, leeks, and other vegetables. The private said nothing, but I have a notion that he had concluded I was honest.

"Though my natural inclination is to sit in a trance and admire the wonders of the universe, when I do get going and steam up I 'm about as wide awake as most people. On the Sunday afternoon, with everybody away, I went down to the office and set to work on my report. The

colonel should have it that very evening. I had all the evidence that was needed, and I could n't well look into anybody's banking-account. I was hot and angry and determined, and I knew I must get the report in early, before the major could queer it. If he were there I could not communicate with the colonel without my communication first passing through his hands. I must get this out before he came back; and now, warned and alarmed as he had doubtless been by his confederates, he might turn up at any moment. The operation he had undergone was not a very serious one, nor anything that could hold him back if he were resolved to go.

"I was rather in a rage. For here were these men, safe and snug at a base, sleeping in beds and getting their four regular meals, and it was now quite certain that, from the major downward and leaving out that silent private, they were doing their best to make us lose the war.

"That was the way I looked at it. It did n't so much matter that they were rogues and thieves and humbugs, but that fact did matter. They were on the enemy's side, the German side, —that 's what it amounted to—working against us from within.

"I was as brief as possible. I put the real figures and the figures we were paying in two parallel columns. I mentioned that Major Baker's contractors, all genuine people, had been dismissed and that we were now dealing with men of straw. I said that they had climbed down in a body when I faced them, but that they would go up again on Major Colgate's return. I enclosed copies of the letters he had written and traversed these with the true facts of the case. I said that I had no confidence in anybody in the office with the one exception of the private. I reckoned the difference between what we were paying and what we ought to pay at thirty thousand pounds a year. When I was done I made three copies on a duplicating machine, and I was addressing the original to the colonel, when who should come in but Colgate himself, red, flustered, and uneasy! I did not rise as he entered.

"'Alone?' he began. 'You're a worker. What have you been up to now?'

"'Are you out of hospital,' I asked, 'or are you going back?' I had no respect for him. His rank was nothing to me. I treated him like the dog he was, throughout that interview.

"'I 'm out,' he said, 'and you 're getting out to-morrow.'

"'Then I was just in time,' I answered. And I picked up a pencil, fixed a sheet of carbon paper, and wrote a covering note addressed to him and asking him to pass my report on to the colonel. By the regulations he had to do it; but he would have first say. Or he might not do it, especially with me leaving.

"When I was done, I handed him his own letter and my report.

"He looked them through and his face grew more red.

"'You know what this means?' he asked. 'You must be mad!' And then: 'It 's simply ridiculous—a man in my position—money—as though I wanted money! We may have been a bit careless,' he conceded; 'but in my position—a big employer—it 's perfectly ridiculous!' And he tossed the papers on the desk. 'What shall I do with these?' he asked; 'burn them?'

"'I 've three more copies,' I said.

"'Look here, Vignolles,' he answered; 'I 'm a major and you 're only a one-pip subaltern. This is n't going to go through.'

"'Oh, yes it is,' I corrected him; 'you 've got

to. It 'll have to go through you, but you 've got to pass it on.'

"He seemed rather relieved at that.

" 'How did you get hold of those letters?' he asked. 'They 're merely business letters and don't mean anything.'

" 'No?' said I; for I knew that he was lying.

"My quiet frightened him. If I had got up and talked he would have talked back; but, icy, contemptuous, not to be turned, I only looked at him. It was disgusting to sit there, me a second-loot, and, metaphorically, spit upon his rank and uniform.

" 'I say,' he resumed at last, 'is there anything I could do—a week's leave in England? I could work it for you.'

" 'If I want leave, I 'll get it from my own unit, and not from this institution,' I said coldly.

"He tried one more bluff before he was done with me.

" 'Every man has his price,' he said; 'what 's yours?'

" 'I 'm rather keen on winning the war,' I answered, 'if there 's anything you can do to help that along. But you and your friends are getting in the way. That 's why you 're going

to be kicked out. And you 've rather rolled our name in the mud in this place, have n't you?' I added, rising. 'But you 're not likely to worry about that.'

"'All right,' he answered savagely, 'all right. There 's nothing more for you to do here. You 'll report to the adjutant to-morrow morning.'

"'Yes, I suppose I 'm finished. You 'll pass that on to the colonel; or, if you like, I 'll buzz in one of my own copies. You 're not here officially yet, are you? There 's nothing about you in orders.'

"He winced at that.

"'I 'll pass it on,' he said. But as I did n't believe him I passed on a copy, myself, that very evening, to make sure.

"Next morning early I had a written order to report back to the adjutant. It found me in my room at the hotel. I walked down to the depot. My car days were over. The adjutant received me with a question.

"'You 've rather upset the old man,' he said. 'He was in his office last evening; and you 're to pack up and be off to where you came from—the sooner the better, he says. What have you been up to?'

"'Ask Colgate.'

"'He 's back all right.'

"I looked on the wall, and Colgate had n't wasted time, it seemed; for there hung this morning's orders, and I saw 'Returned to Duty,' and the first name on the list was 'Major E. P. Colgate.' Below this was a brief notice—I read it aloud—which told us that for stealing a tin of condensed milk in the depot a certain private had been sentenced to one year's hard labor. It was pretty ironic.

"'What 's Colgate getting?' I asked; for now I was fairly roused and did n't care who knew it.

"'He 'll be caught in time,' said the adjutant.

"'He 's caught now.' And then I let fly utterly. 'He 's a thief and a liar—been robbing the army these six months. I can prove it up to to the ruddy hilt and I 've reported it. Here 's a copy for you'; and I gave him one of the couple I still had over.

"The adjutant whistled. He was rather alarmed. 'This is confidential,' he said hurriedly. 'I don't want to be mixed up in it.' And then, more coolly, 'They have n't treated you very well,' he added. 'Look in and report before you go. This afternoon, eh? The old

man wants me to telephone; rather glad to see you out of the way.'

"'All right,' I answered, more sick and more savage than ever. For I felt I 'd done my duty, had even earned a word or two of praise; and to be treated like this, as though *I* were the criminal—it hurt.

"I 'd left a few things at the office, including a pipe or two I valued. I went in for the last time, and there my enemies sat in a serried row, the corporal, the interpreter, and the major. They looked at me as though they had won a victory, as though they had downed me. Every one of them.

"I found the things I 'd come for. The private made them up into a parcel for me; and as I turned to go, 'Oh, Vignolles, I saw the colonel,' drawled Colgate, 'I explained matters to him. You took a bad knock up the line, did n't you? Concussion? Makes a man a bit queer in his head at times, eh? I explained all that to him and he understands it. He 's overlooking that unfortunate report.'

"The blighter had me every way, if the colonel played up to him; so there was no answer; and in that moment I felt that there was n't much to

choose between him and his precious chief. The colonel was getting rid of me to demolish the evidence. I was one of those inconvenient people who know too much.

"It was no good arguing and I went my way. And there it ended, or looked like ending. I was pretty bitter about it for several weeks. Till one day, not so very much later, as I was looking through a Gazette, I found that a Major E. P. Colgate of the Army Service Corps had 'relinquished his commission'; which meant that he 'd been asked to leave and there was no refusing. I felt then that, whatever my subsequent history, I should have earned every penny I drew in pay and a bit over.

"I 'd more or less gone past it all, till, only a few months back, I ran into that never-to-be-forgotten adjutant. It was at a rest camp in France. He was a major now and I a captain, and he remembered me.

"Naturally I spoke about the supply depot, about Colgate and the colonel.

"'I was rather sore,' I ended. 'You people hardly played the game.'

"'The colonel 's a regular,' he said; 'what was he to do? He 'd let the fellow carry on for six

months and he 'd be held responsible. He was overworked and worried, and it was his bread and butter and his wife's and four youngsters'. He 'd trusted Colgate, who had let him down. So you were best out of the way; he did n't want any fuss. But it went off quietly. He looked into it, and Mr. Colgate had to go—quietly. They all had to go. He shoved a new man in with orders to clean up. You 'd really made a pretty thorough job of it, it seemed.'

" 'Colgate got off fairly easy, then?'

" 'Not quite. He was kicked out, was n't he? That did n't do him any good. And he was young enough to be collared after he 'd been kicked out. Went in one door a major and came out of another a private, so to speak. I don't think he 'd enjoy that—"a big employer of labor—must set an example." ' The adjutant imitated him to the life. 'He 'd set more of an example than he 'd bargained for. And there was that little interpreter, too. He got sent back to the French Army with a pretty rotten report. Hope he 's alive to-day. He probably is n't. The corporal lost his stripes and went up the line with a couple of mules.'

"So that was how it had ended? I was hot about it, confoundedly hot about it for a season, hotter than I 'd ever been before. These things are n't written up. Yet they hold most of the drama, the real drama that goes on in a war—more exciting and more sustained than the fighting. But you 've got to go behind the lines to look for it." He stopped here and gave a little shudder. "By Jove, it 's turning cold again!" he added.

The sun had gone down in the west, in a flush of pink and rose, and we, from our perch on the edge of a park, were looking out upon a valley fast losing itself in shadow. The rabbits nibbled around us, unafraid; the cock pheasants were calling; an owl was circling overhead. And Vignolles, looking out upon it all, upon this wide landscape, so full and so secure, that was about to go from us, stretched and shook himself and sprang to his feet and gazed upon it, darkling. And then, "England 's a good country, the very best," he said; "but there are far too many Colgates running wild in it. I can't compete with them. I never could."

We climbed the stile and found the lane and

so downhill till we came to the railway station. And that was the last day out I had with my friend Vignolles till he turned up again, resolved to stay, the following year.

THE PROFITEER

THE PROFITEER

I

TO see old Vignolles, vivid and all alert, safe in a big arm-chair again, reposing in my rooms, eloquent and nervous, or thoughtful and sitting at his ease! That was to me one of those rare delights that go with friendship—the slow and cautious friendship of the middle years. One does not make friends easily after one has climbed the hill. I suppose one is critical, or difficult—call it what you like. But Vignolles I had tested, I had known so thoroughly; and every time he had given the right answer. He played so openly; I could take him or leave him; this is what he was like, or that. He did n't care whether I approved of him or disapproved. He was always himself; and I liked that self most utterly, with never a reservation. I dare say, if you come to analysis, it was because Vignolles did the things that I could do only in dreams, imaginatively. He actually *did* them. While

I, when it came to action—I funked them, I suppose. I could see them and the way of them; I would have loved to follow; but there were always prudence and the risks. These held me back. But Vignolles had never funked anything.

He had always gone on. If a dream, a course of action, came to him, he followed it, no matter where it led. He did not count the cost. It was the right thing to do and he did it. The right thing for *him* to do, I should have said. For me it would have been most definitely the wrong thing. I could not have seen it out; or my nerve would have given way. . . . But here he was, tall, spare, and dark, in spite of the gray hair. I dare say this peculiar effect of darkness came from his eyes—singularly dark eyes—you could n't help but notice them. They were the eyes of a young man, though he was well, very well, into the fifties. And of course he was burnt and browned by those tropic suns of his, and you never felt that his clothes mattered very much or that he took the least pains with them.

He had come back to England a week before, from somewhere close to the Equator. Out East it was; and he had returned there after he had

left the army. It was a plantation, or maybe two plantations, where he grew tea and rubber. I don't know much about that kind of enterprise, though I 've bought shares and seen them go up and down like mercury in a glass, and made money and lost it and drawn dividends. But Vignolles had gone straight out to the fountain-head and had come back with a fortune. He was a war profiteer, he declared, of the very worst kind. He 'd taken our money and had n't done a day's work to deserve it. I wonder whether I can tell his story somehow near the way he told it.

"You remember," he said, "I had more or less got settled when the war found us out—upset things, so it seemed. But, as a matter of fact, I 've come through, and it 's made rather a rich man of me. I can't help it; but there it is. I thought I was going to be ruined and all the rest of it. I 'd counted on that; but, of course, one does n't hesitate. You don't know my people? There were quite a good few of us; but I 've only a sister left now. She 's married and pretty well done for; used to be rather a good sort. I 'd been what they call a 'rolling stone' for years and years; simply could n't help it.

What 's the use of living if you don't live and see things and know the sort of place you 're inhabiting and its diversities? I 'd been rather a rolling stone and a thorn in the flesh. You see, my people were in commerce; and I was absolutely uncommercial, and even unprofessional; they 'd have stood something respectable, like doctoring or law. I wanted to see the world and men and cities; and so I roamed and roamed and roamed till I was long past forty, instead of making provision for my old age; instead of devoting myself to a wife and family. That 's the proper thing to do if you 're a Vignolles. So my father looked at it, and my grandfather, and aunts and uncles. But *they 'd* done all that, and, nineteen-thirteen or so, they were all gone and they 'd left me a few thousands—could n't help themselves, it seemed; could n't take it away with them.

"My sister got a good bit, and the stock-broker she 's married to, and the children are coming in for their lot; but I got some as well. You see, I 'd never done anything very disgraceful, except roll and be a thorn. I put the money into tea and rubber; went in with a fellow called Sutherland. He knew all about it. He was a Scotch-

man, not very well off, but deuced honest. It's a jolly life. You ride about on a pony and watch other people work—nice bronze savages—they enjoy it if you treat 'em well. It's their life; they've never known any other. You watch the things grow; you have n't a care in the world; and you're very happy. At least I was; and so was Sutherland. He had diabetes, poor chap; but if he ate the right kind of food and drank the right kind of drink, he was not much the worse for it; fact is, it tended to make him the steady, God-fearing kind of chap he was and is.

"We were just on the edge of making a good living and putting money by when the war came and busted up everything. At least, so I felt, and so did most of us. I raced home and joined up; you remember, that's how we found one another? Rather a middle-aged couple!" And Vignolles paused here and chuckled over the pair of us, and the figure we had cut in uniform; a brace of grizzled subalterns, saluting majors half our age and trying hard to take 'em seriously; and I dare say they were doing the same by us.

He resumed:

"Everybody who could stand upright or sit a horse came trooping home. But there was that poor old blighter Sutherland! He had diabetes and they would n't look at him. You had to take an oath that you were free from 'organic disease'—that 's what they called it—before they 'd let you sail, and there was a doctor who knew all about him. So Sutherland had to stay behind and look after the tea and the rubber. He 'd had five years of it before I turned up again. He was Scotch and honest and shrewd and devilish hard-working; and though I had n't done a stroke or a hand's turn in those five years, I was his partner and he 'd made a rich man of me. Simply could n't help it. The prices went up and up and up, whether you wanted 'em to or not. The world was in a conspiracy to make the two of us rich. That 's what it seemed like. I know a dozen men who 've been treated just the same, and scores of others who 've been broke and done in, and more still who are being caught now it 's all over. War 's curious. Even my gifted brother-in-law is n't quite the same success that he used to be. . . . But I 've sold out to Sutherland," my friend concluded. "You see, money 's not much use to a

man out there. Here—here in England, I 've a fancy one might do some good with it."

And this, more or less, is the way in which my friend Vignolles became a profiteer, and put away a roving life and returned to the country of his fathers; where he lived very plainly in a second-rate hotel, and no doubt pondered ways and means of doing "some good with it."

II

There was the house, to begin with. Vignolles had bought it. You could n't well avoid buying a house if you wished to live in one just then. It was not right in London and it was not right in the country; it was exactly on the dividing line where the one begins and the other ends. Vignolles would drive you up to town in an hour with his car; or you could leave the house on foot and go across the fields, through woods, orchards, and plantations till you arrived at what he called his "view." It looked out over half a county: a landscape-painter might describe its strange variety and the marvelous great sky that overspread it and made you feel that here was

English air. After London one could fill one's lungs here, and fill one's eyes, and empty one's heart of all our dismal struggles and inward-turning thought. One looked out from here and found one's wings again. Maybe we two old buffers but shared an illusion or were blinded by the beauty of that scene. Still, there it was, and it did one's eyes good to look out on it. And next we would tramp back to the house, which was rapidly filling with Vignolles's purchases; for here he had resolved to make his home. There was a cottage next to the front gate where lived the gardener. He had belonged to the house and seemed to go with it; and, incidentally, he and his now watched out that no one stole the furniture, and the bed and table linen, and the china, and the silver, and the carpets, books, and pictures, and all the other truck that Vignolles was accumulating.

He was doing it entirely by himself and most methodically. He still kept to his second-rate hotel; and there he would brood for a week upon each room. He had a plan of the place, complete; passages, stairways, rooms, landings, lobbies, and what not. He took them one by one, saw them in his mind's eye, and dealt with them

like a decorator or an artist; and when he had done with his mental image and set it down on paper, he went out and about in London and ordered and chose the things. He created a dozen interiors. He had the measurements and shape of every place. "But it 's all empty," he said, smiling; "the joke 'll begin when I find people to live in it."

Even the kitchen of that house must be original, he had insisted. And it was. The pots and pans and things all lived in cupboards with glass doors; tables and chairs were chosen like the rest; and the place had color and character. And, lastly, he scattered baths about that house, and the servants' quarters were much like other people's.

"My sister goes round with me at times," he explained, "and tells me how mad I am. But this is only a beginning. When I 'm done—" He did n't finish, but kept us on the edge of anticipations. When he had "done," I inferred, his sister would regard him as a public danger.

The house, at last, was "done"; but that was only, as he had so rightly said, "a beginning." The next step was an effort constructed with his usual care in the seclusion afforded by that very

second-rate hotel. In my rooms one evening he produced it. Just a slip of paper; and on it I read:

> *Housekeeper required for gentleman's place near London. War widow with one or two children would be given preference. Replies to Captain V. C/o Smith, Hammett and Smith, Solicitors, 14, London Wall, E. C.*

It was the first time I had known Vignolles to claim the rank wherewith he had passed out of the army.

"I 'm shoving this advertisement into half a dozen papers. It 's the least I can do for 'em; and I 'm rather fond of kids," he explained, "and it 'll mean a home for some good lady."

"It 's certainly an idea," I said; "but why not advertise straight out for a wife and family and be done with it?"

"Oh, I 'm only after the kids. I could give 'em a chance, could n't I? And I 've rather missed that side of life; never had time for it, or even the money, until to-day."

I found the advertisement on the front page of my "Morning Post" the following Friday; I

picked up "The Times" at the club on the Saturday and there it was; and I found it again on the Sunday in "The Observer." No wonder that I lost my friend for over a week! I pictured him, snowed under, engaged with women-folk and correspondence. It is not exactly a joke or a matter for laughter. But, still, I chuckled. I could n't have faced it—those widows and those kids. No, I positively could n't!

III

But Vignolles had faced it, and was facing it, and would go on facing it. He dropped in on the ninth day and said: "I think I 've got 'em. There 's a Mrs. Tyrrell—three kids—one grown up and fending for herself, a boy of ten, and a girl of twelve. I get the two small ones if everything goes well. We 're making each other's acquaintance to begin with."

"And the mother?" I asked; for I was n't quite so deuced paternal and was more interested in her than in the rest.

"The mother 's all right. Her husband was a gunner Regular, and she appreciates the situation. She 's had five years of it with her in-

laws; I don't suppose it quite agrees with her. Of course, she did n't say anything; but one guesses. I 'm taking the two kids to the Zoo to-morrow, and next day we 'll have the car and all run down to see my view."

He told me about all sorts of other kids, and how he had dealt with them, with their mothers, and with everything.

"It 's pretty simple," he said; "I go by the letters. When there 's a woman behind 'em I keep them; when they 're just a lot of words, I chuck 'em away. There were only twenty good ones out of close on two hundred. The ladies were written to, and when I 'd seen them I asked to see the kids. I judged them by the way they took that side of the question. Twelve fell out on that—seemed to fancy it might be *them* that I was after and that the kids did n't so much matter. It 's a pathetic world"; and Vignolles, half smiling, half serious, lit a fresh cigarette.

I recall some of his "kids" and a few of his widows; for he had entertained me an entire evening with the story of them; and, no doubt, I had prompted and encouraged this recital,

which was all life's business to him at that particular period and phase.

There was one little girl he had rejected owing to her incredible appetite for mutton. It sounds incredible, but he was as positive as he was disgusted. "The mother was all right," he had said, "seemed a very capable woman otherwise; but an only child, spoilt, and restless, and greedy as a little pig—I could n't stand that. She 'd already called me 'uncle,' and sprawled in the best chair without being asked, and suggested that I should buy her a doll and a scooter; it 'll be hats and jeweler's truck ten years from now, and she 'll exploit the whole race of us if she 's pretty enough, and give us icy kisses for our trouble. I had the two of them to lunch, and that precious child demanded three helpings of mutton—just sat and yelped for them till she got 'em. No, she was n't hungry, but just a little pig; and she looked it too—a very fat child. The father may have been a hero, but if he 'd lived, perhaps he 'd have overeaten himself and died of apoplexy. There 's a king in history who did that—one of the early ones—stuffed himself with lampreys, whatever they are. I think the

lady must have noticed that I did n't like her bairn."

Another of his widows had two daughters, delightful, grown-up girls; and the mother was so charming that you wondered whether nature had made her so or whether it was an art she had acquired. Vignolles lingered over this trio with a certain reluctance, as though it had cost him an effort to part with them; as indeed, it had.

"I invited the lot to dinner; a very good dinner, too," he said. " 'There 's no fool like an old fool'—it 's a quotation from Solomon or some other wise old josser. I kept that sage remark in front of me the whole blissful evening. There was the charming mother, a dangerous creature; though I suspect nothing much to look at in the morning; cross, I imagine, but brightening all day and toward nightfall positively radiant. There was the engaged girl, who had driven a car in France and was going to marry one of her officers when they could afford it. She wore her hair short, had the freshest, healthiest complexion, and was just like a nice boy. She probably thought me rather an old ass. The other girl was beautiful; just that and nothing more; as though it were her job and she took it

very seriously. Well, it 's as good a job as most jobs, and a darned sight better than some of 'em. I 'm rather sensitive to beauty. At my age I ought to know better; but, somehow, I never shall. And she knew that I knew how beautiful she was and thrilled to it as one thrills to music made on a violin. I loved the very sight of her; but though I may be old and a bit of a fool, I 'm not quite fool enough to live in a house with things like that. A Moslem pasha might manage it; but it 's not done in England by elderly gentlemen unless they 're eager for trouble. I ought to get a medal for resisting that trio; many a one has been given for less. One is flesh and blood sometimes, after all," he added wistfully.

I must omit the others—there were several more—and return to the Mrs. Tyrrell whom he had mentioned in the first instance with her boy of ten and her girl of twelve, and a second girl who was grown up and out in the world. These seemed to suit his case better than any of the rest, and he seemed to suit theirs very perfectly and fully.

"I like her," he had commented, reverting to Mrs. Tyrrell. "She 's very straightforward and

natural. She sees quite plainly what I 'm after, and she 's not thinking of herself at all. One could make a very good friend of her. She 's keen on giving those two kids a chance. Her eighteen-year old girl, the one that 's independent, just went off and found herself a job. Had n't got to be driven—full of pluck and a good head on her—saw that her mother was n't having exactly a rosy time of it, though she is n't the sort that complains. The two of them are something like sisters, and there 's rather a dash of the protective attitude about that girl. She 's somebody's secretary. I call her the secretary-bird. There 's one at the Zoo, where I 'm taking the kids to-morrow. They 're quite unspoilt and think me wonderful. Poor little devils! They 'll get a hell of a shock some day, when they know the truth!"

But for all his passing off the matter so lightly, he could not avoid a burst of confidence where it came to "those two kids." Some people might call it balked paternal instinct; but it was, rather, a fine light that he threw over the three of them, dropping all his disguises at last and speaking as he felt about it; about himself and Mrs. Tyrrell's little boy and girl.

"You see, their mother had never tried for a job before," he had run on; "and she was a bit timid about it; but for their sakes—I guess it is for their sakes a deuced sight more than for her own. She wrote from the house where she was living with her in-laws, and I told her to come up and see me—I 've a sitting-room now in that hotel you so despise. Well, she turned up all right and she understood me. She was a trifle shy at first, but when she found herself and we really got to talking and she discovered I was n't so very terrible, she became more easy, and I felt that if the kids were all right, she 'd do. I asked her about them next, and she confessed that they were waiting downstairs for her in the hall. You see, she had n't quite fancied the job of asking and being interviewed by a man from Lord knows where, and she 'd wanted something to keep up her pluck, and so she 'd brought them along as a kind of body-guard, or for company. I don't think she put it quite that way, but one feels these things. It gave her more confidence. And I said, 'Let 's send for them; or I 'll go down, myself.'

"I went down and found them waiting, very good, on a settee; the girl a bit motherly, being

two years the older; the boy, a chubby little chap in an Eton suit—thoroughbreds both. They were n't a bit afraid of me, bless them! They looked up when I spoke and read me and trusted me, and when they do that it 's difficult to resist. I only had to put out a hand, and they came, quite simply, quite naturally, as though we had known each other all our lives.

"'You 're Captain Vignolles,' they said.

"'How did you know?' I laughed.

"'We knew,' they both answered. 'Mummy told us about it and read us your letter.'

"It did n't seem strange to them; nothing seemed strange to them. If we 'd only had bread and cheese for lunch, they would n't have minded; and when we drove down to the house and I told them that if they liked they could live there, they did n't seem to feel it was strange or wonderful or unpleasant or anything, but just said, 'Yes.' For the world is a queer place to children and they never quite know what 's going to happen next. But whatever happens is very interesting, as long as it does n't hurt too much; as long as it does n't over-pain their body or their soul. We 've agreed to do half a dozen things together," he ended, "and if we don't bore

each other too much, the Tyrrells are going down to live in that old house."

IV

There had been something contradictory in Vignolles's account of his relations with those two children. In one breath they thought him "wonderful," and yet were quite unstirred by the material comforts and other benefits his friendship offered or seemed to promise. I asked him about this, for I could n't well follow it.

"My dear old chump," he responded, "don't you see that it's *me,* Vignolles, they think wonderful, and that the house and home and all the rest of it are only a house and home. The things money, sordid cash, can buy don't interest them; but to have *me* as a friend, *me* to romp with and to chatter to—they seem to like that and it's very new and unexpected. Most of the others were after my money. I had it and they wanted it, and I don't suppose they thought much further. Yes, even the children seemed to share that taint, had drawn it from whatever home or atmosphere they came from. But these

two are free from it and we can just be friends; and, of course, I 'm wonderful, because I 'm a grown-up, and because I 'm ready to talk to them quite seriously and listen very seriously to all they have to say. And then they seem to think I 've done things, seen the world and had adventures. They make discoveries about me every day. Can't help it. We go to the Zoo and they find out that I 've seen eagles, not in cages but flying in the air and sitting on nests; and that I 've seen elephants and camels in their own countries, and sailed down rivers full of hippoes and crocodiles. And Kit 's found out that I once killed a man—I was n't aware of it till he told me. You see, the other fellow was just a Chink who tried to do me in. I did him in, instead. It had never occurred to me that I 'd done anything very out of the way till Kit blazed up about it and Eden opened her eyes. No, those two don't care a button about money and the house, but they do love grabbing hold of me and making me confess. I rather let myself go with them," he added, with a curious shy tenderness; and one could read the love he 'd missed and the gratitude he felt at picking up

these crumbs—or, it might be, a banquet—late in middle age.

The two children and he invaded my rooms one afternoon with paper bags of cakes and baker's stuff, and announced that they had come for tea, Vignolles acting as spokesman. That was my own introduction to this new alliance. My rooms are in the Temple, and between them they discovered that I was a Knight Templar and something of a successor to the rascals who had fought in the Crusades and who occurred in "Ivanhoe," a book those kids were full of. But all the same they unpacked their cakes and scones, and laid the table and boiled a kettle of water on the gas-stove, and had a regular picnic with me as their sole guest. It was an eventful afternoon for all of us.

I caught the three of them together again one chilly afternoon as I was crossing London Bridge. Everybody else was busy and hurried and absorbed; but these three stood quite openly upon the bridge and got in people's way and looked at the gulls and shipping and wharves and water, like travelers lingering over the sights and wonders of a foreign land.

I knew the spot for one of Vignolles's favorite haunts when he had felt lonely and restless; when the call from ocean after ocean had come to him, asking why he had turned deserter. From here one could watch the ships and their broad highway running out to the salt seas and leading to every corner and crevice of that fabulous world wherein for thirty years he had adventured. To-day he was talking it over with these children, and they were as wide awake and as mystery-lured as he. I could understand then how to them our friend was "wonderful." He had been out there and come back; he had known shipwreck—they had made him own up to it—and seen savage men and cannibals, and sharks and whales and fish that flew in air.

Once or twice he came in to me dead beat, tired out with answering questions, with making himself quite small again, with seeing the world through their fresh, happy eyes. But in the main he could hold his own, and enjoyed himself so thoroughly, reliving his past with them, re-finding old scenes, old faces, old sorrows, old temptations; relieved of trouble, of grossness, of disillusionment, of all the struggles he had known and overcome, the fears, the hauntings.

Rosily and through mists he now could see these things, and, if he was to hold his two companions, that was the right way. Soon enough they would touch a fuller knowledge! And, meanwhile, they had made a hero of him. He admitted it; and, "Well, somebody has to make a hero of you," he added, laughing; "or else life 's not much fun; now, is it?"

And while all this was going on in London, Mrs. Tyrrell, duly appointed and given a free hand, was occupied with getting servants and making ready for their move into the house.

V

I have never known exactly what were the business arrangements that brought Mrs. Tyrrell and the two children out of Richmond, where they had shared a home with the elder Tyrrells, down to the house that Vignolles had bought and furnished on the country's edge. I dare say she had a salary, and there was, of course, her pension, and as for the rest of it, I have no doubt that Vignolles footed the bills.

Kit now went to a new school, the best in the district, and wore as the mark of it a sky-blue

cap with a yellow cross. Eden, whose real name was Evelyn, but who somehow had slipped into this more appropriate designation, had become one of an establishment the pupils of which wore black straw hats with an embroidered device in brown on the front of a dark-blue ribbon. They rode to school on bicycles, with a satchel slung from their shoulder, and the boy was engrossed in football and Eden was great on hockey. I often had week-ends with them and grew to know Mrs. Tyrrell; and Berta, the girl who was out in the world and somebody's secretary; and there were the two in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Tyrrell senior, we will call them, though perhaps I ought more properly to speak of "The Honorable," for they had that courtesy title, or handle, or whatever it is, being the younger children of persons of distinction long defunct.

Three generations, therefore, of that family were sometimes together under the one roof, and to me it was ever an interesting study to watch them; for I felt it was almost like watching history and the processes of evolution out of hand. Mrs. Tyrrell, it was true, was only a daughter-in-law and not a daughter; but, still, she might have been. She was entirely of the

Tyrrell class and their tradition. Rather a helpless class and tradition, it occurred to me, conscious of a new world marching on.

And in addition to his new-found friends, I met Mrs. Carey-Holt, the sister of whom Vignolles had occasionally spoken; and there was her husband, the stock-broker; and young Francis Carey-Holt, and Miss Jane Carey-Holt, their offspring. Vignolles did not seem exactly enamored of his niece and nephew.

"The boy 's too much like a young lady for my taste," he said, discussing them; "had everything done for him—never seems to have put his nose outside of London—been to all the cinemas and dances all the latest dances, but after that you come to a blank wall. It 's a pity he did n't get roped in for the war. He 'd have traveled, at any rate, and probably been kicked a little."

As for his niece, according to Vignolles, she was quite definitely out to get a husband. That was her purpose in life, and she was n't very particular whom she got so long as he had the right income and was moderately presentable. "The little devil makes no bones about it!" he exclaimed, smiling. "She 's honest, at least,

though I tell her she might as well mark herself up for sale openly as do it that way. Comes to the same thing. And she answers: 'Uncle, you 're a back number'; and she shakes her head over me and says, 'No wonder you never got on; you never would have done if it had n't been for this old war.' I rather like her in a curious way," he added. "She 's got more stuff in her than the boy and she bullies her father."

Carey-Holt, the stock-broker, I never knew with any intimacy, and it never seemed to me that there was anything to know. I believe he had persuaded himself that he had fallen in love with his wife before he married her; he went to the City every morning and was engrossed in the ups and downs of his stocks and shares; and he was, I suppose, of some use as a kind of instigator and lubricant. But outside of this he did as everybody else did of his rather narrow acquaintanceship; wore the same clothes, played the same golf, ate the same dinners and sat down to the same rubbers of "auction," and drank and smoked much as his friends. And for doing all this he seemed to get paid a very comfortable income. I often wondered why; but I don't think he ever troubled, except to feel that it was n't

large enough and never would be. And yet, he was n't conceited. He was rather a heavy, simple kind of fellow, with no particular pretensions; but he certainly had an appetite for money, and nothing but money, that knew no bounds.

This, more or less, was the family circle or environment which now beset Vignolles, home from all his wanderings and seemingly at rest and settled down for good within the borders of his native land. He had, of course, his other interests; for he had joined numerous societies, the Officers' Association, Comrades of the Great War, and similar institutions, where he felt that he and his money might be of use. I never saw his name put forward or stuck out in the newspapers; I think he avoided that as he would a plague. But in his way he was deep enough in these things, attending committees and shelling out and talking little, though making rather a strong point of common sense. One way and another, I heard a good deal about all these affairs. He would discuss them with me, and of course, as an old "comrade" myself, I took some interest as well. He seemed, however, now to have made his life and settled down to it; what

with the children, his home, and a variety of valuable things outside of it. It might all go on smoothly; or, on the other hand, it might be only a new beginning, leading to some adventure more turgid and more marked than any that had gone before.

VI

I do not know precisely why all those people came to me. I dare say it was because I stood outside their troubles and was not particularly involved in them; but first one came and then another, till I knew exactly what everybody felt and thought and conjectured about everybody else. And of course I listened, but I don't believe that I ever took sides. It seemed to do them good to have it out with somebody, and I being handy and not belonging to any special camp, they all of them had it out with me. This is what modern civilization comes to, I suppose; crowds of people living elbow to elbow, and the more they see of one another, the more they dislike each other and pick each other to pieces. The women are the worst offenders, having leisure and, therefore, plenty of time to brood.

Well, I 've no doubt they have their grievances. There was Mrs. Carey-Holt, for instance, Vignolles's only sister. She had a good deal to say for herself, and I admit that I listened very politely to all she had to say.

As a close friend of their brother and their uncle, Mrs. Carey-Holt and all the Carey-Holts had accepted me. I had been asked to dine; I had played "auction"; I had met various gracious members of their "set." I believe that I could have reëstablished myself socially in this new circle, had I felt so disposed, and that Carey-Holt voted me "a good fellow." They lived in a big sprawling house in a good suburb, where the young Carey-Holts took some kind of festive lead, being full of parties and theaters and dances and other interesting matters which filled the house with other young people and led to a deal of discursive talk. Mrs. Carey-Holt seemed to like it, and her husband's chief function was to pay up. I can't say that I took any of these people very seriously, till my hostess fairly cornered me one Saturday afternoon. I owed her a call, I remember, and she had said that she was always at home on Saturday afternoons.

Everybody else was out, apparently, and we had her own little boudoir to ourselves; for, "You see, I am treating you quite as an old friend," she said, waving me to a chair; and then I inquired after the others and was told that they were at their Badminton club and that Mr. Carey-Holt was playing golf.

She felt her way, so to speak, before she came to her main point that afternoon, and when she reached the right moment, "Don't you think Fred is making rather a fool of himself over those Tyrrells?" she asked genially, as though her brother were some kind of naughty child, who must be protected and remonstrated with, and as though, perhaps, she intended the latter job for me in case of need.

"In what way?" I responded, all innocence and seeking information.

"In every way," said she.

"I like Mrs. Tyrrell," I put in blandly.

'But would a woman with any self-respect place herself in that position?"

"It 's a perfectly innocent position, I assure you," I began—

"Yes, we know all about that; but—is it done?" she asked abruptly.

"Since the war," I ventured, "a good many things are done that would n't have been done before the war."

"But he might have got some decent woman, even a lady, a single woman; there are lots of them about."

"She 'd have fallen in love with him—a sentimental spinster—they 're the very dickens!" I protested, laughing.

Mrs. Carey-Holt laughed too; yet, for all that, she stuck quite grimly to her point.

"But Mrs. Tyrrell, with those two children, is far more dangerous," she resumed; "and there 's a girl of eighteen, and the grandparents as well—Fred seems to have adopted the whole family."

"Well, why not?" I asked, lightly. "They 're in a way comrades of his, and they 've been hit pretty hard; and what 's a pension nowadays, with everything costing double? And the old Tyrrells have only a fixed income that won't stretch. It 's rather lucky they fell in with Fred Vignolles."

I had put it fairly bluntly toward the end. I did n't see that she had much to complain of, with that big house of hers and plenty of serv-

ants, and her own money and Carey-Holt's to pay the bills.

"But if Fred had wanted to do something with his money," she persisted, "there 're his own niece and nephew, are n't there? I don't believe in going outside one's own family," she added, "and no more do you."

So that was her point? She was jealous of the Tyrrells, and she wanted Vignolles's money to go to her own brood and not to be frittered away outside.

It was a situation, I suppose, one might have foreseen; yet, for all that, I really could n't help blurting out the truth and letting her have it straight. "When Fred was hard up," I said, "he must have saved you a lot of trouble."

She laughed at that. She was really pretty decent over it, and she never seemed to bear me any grudge for my candor.

"Of course you 're fond of him," she said, "and like him to have his own way in things; and then you 're a selfish old bachelor. But when one 's married, one does think of one's own children; it 's only natural, is n't it?"

She turned the subject after that; but she had made it pretty clear to me that Vignolles and

his peculiar schemes hardly met with her approval, and that, indeed, Mrs. Tyrrell, and especially the two Tyrrell children, she regarded as obstacles that stood unfairly and unexpectedly in the way of her own far more deserving girl and boy.

And that, I imagined, was the view taken by all the Carey-Holt family; by young Francis and by Miss Jane, and by the stock-broker himself, no less emphatically. But as it was a matter that, to my unbiased mind, concerned my friend and my friend only, I felt that it was certainly not within my province to interfere.

VII

I have already said that I liked Mrs. Tyrrell, whose friends called her "Angela," a name, by the way, that admirably suited her, as I ventured to think when I first caught it. There was, quite unaffectedly, something angelic about that charming lady, whose age I guessed a year or two under forty and whose face and figure were still very much that of a young woman. And she was capable, too, and firm where needed. She ran the house successfully, was clever with

the servants, and was not at all obtrusive or inclined to act the "boss." In her place many a good woman might have yielded.

Vignolles, though probably quite unaware and just his natural self, was equally tactful. He looked on, so to speak, rather than played the master in that house and its "appurtenances." He had his own den, his own quarters, his own everything. When at home he would most often invite himself to luncheon with the children and their mother; but at breakfast and at dinner he was alone, unless they had people down from London—the older Tyrrells, Berta Tyrrell, the Carey-Holts, or myself, for instance. Outside this small circle he usually entertained at one or another of his clubs. All this suited Mrs. Tyrrell, and to Vignolles it gave something that, not without reason, he might regard as hard-won anchorage.

My week-ends were very frequently spent amid these surroundings. I liked that Georgian house, so close to London and yet so distant, with its bright gardens and shrubberies, its green meadows and its avenue of trees. It was not a very big place as places go; but, it had a completeness, a variety, which showed that the

people who had lived here and were now dispersed had loved it and spent a few of their generations upon its making.

Mrs. Tyrrell loved it, too, and she said so quite openly.

"It 's often hard to believe in all our luck," she remarked to me one Sunday morning as we strolled out of doors. "It 's more like a thing one dreams of than a thing that has happened."

"But Vignolles is like that—exactly like that," I answered, smiling. "Have n't you noticed he always does the things that other people do only in fancy?"

She and I were intimate enough by then to talk with a certain freedom of our host.

"You 've known Mr. Vignolles longer than I have," she replied; "and, of course, I only know this one thing."

"There are lots of others," I said. "He seems to have lived mainly to be the exception that proves the rule; you 've heard of it?"

"I have—only too often!" she laughed; and then, "Mrs. Carey-Holt, that sister of his, does n't like me," she added. "She does n't like any of us; I suppose it 's natural."

"She 'll get over it. She does pretty well as

she pleases, herself, so why should n't Vignolles?"

"The children are happy here; that 's the main thing," she resumed. "I had often wondered, before this, what was to become of them. You see, we were so very hard up—everybody decent is hard up, nowadays; or almost everybody." She laughed again as she corrected herself; and, "Of course, I 've no wish to be personal," she added, discreetly; and, "What a charming woman," I thought; "what a very charming woman!"

But all I said aloud was, "Vignolles made his money only by a fluke"; and then I went on to tell her something of his past life and how the miracle of his present affluence had come about.

"It 's strange, is n't it?" she said, when I had ended; "and it might have turned out just the other way!"

"He 's keen on doing what he calls 'some good with it.' That 's rather fine of him." And next, "I believe old Vignolles could live on bread and cheese and a cheap cigarette; he has n't much use for money, himself," I added; and it seemed to me that I had grown a trifle lyrical and rather enthusiastic about our friend.

"He 's been most good to the children," she answered, smiling, and I think a little amused at me. "And even to Berta," she continued; "takes her out and buys her hats and frocks till she gets quite annoyed with him. I often wonder what Arthur would say if he could come back and see us."

She was speaking of the soldier who had been her husband, the father of the three that Vignolles was concerned with; for even the independent Berta, I now learnt, was not outside the urgency he felt to give.

"He 'd be rather relieved, I should fancy—if I 'm any judge," I ventured.

"Yes, I dare say," she answered, dubiously; "but perhaps he 'd feel it was n't quite—"

"Quite what?"

"Well, quite the thing for a Tyrrell. And, of course, Mr. Vignolles, though he 's an angel and all that, he is n't quite—no, I should n't have said that, should I?" And she looked at me so frankly with her clear blue eyes; and I could only smile and think how pretty she was, standing there with the sunlight filling her hair and making it more golden than ever, and her pure complexion, and her beautiful, round figure.

And it flashed upon me, as I watched her, that the Arthur who had been her husband had never awakened this woman, had never loved her as she might have been loved, and that that was why she was so like a child to-day, in spite of her own three children and her forty years, or whatever it was. And of all this she was quite unconscious; of her own power as of her own weakness. I admit that, at the moment, I felt a stress to sail in myself and try what I could make of her. It might have been a passing insurgency or even a passing mood; for one does n't often do these things—now, does one? And just then the children rushed out on us; they had been to the village church with Vignolles, and were come back all zeal and mischief, like two colts liberated and free to kick up their heels. And he, good chap, was happy—as happy as I had ever known him; and looking it, too, as his eyes rested on that delightful place, all green and sunlit, and the two children, and Mrs. Tyrrell and me, standing there, both rather happy as well.

It was a scene, a thing, that he had created, much as an artist creates—a something out of a nothing. And just like that he must have felt;

that he had made it and all its implicit happiness; and this, no doubt, was why, in his own face, I caught a gleam of a something that was deeper than satisfaction. With his money he had been able to give the five of us this very perfect moment. Yes, it was, indeed, a matter to feel deeply and to be more than glad about; just as a painter glows after he has made a beautiful thing, or a writer who has finished a new story.

VIII

So far I have dealt with only the two generations, with the children, five years of whose short lives had been passed amid the realities and deprivations of the war; impressionable years, when the mind yields readily to the heroic and sees a champion in every poor devil who has adventured, with what reluctances and hesitations heaven alone can say. And there was my own generation that included the elder Carey-Holts and Mrs. Tyrrell and Vignolles. With us the war had been, among other things, as a bridge, a satanic interlude: we had known something of life before its coming, and now we were

back, ennobled by it, or scarred by it, or whatever it may have done to us. The Carey-Holts, for instance, had firmly made up their minds that there had never been a war. They had, in fact, refused to tolerate it any longer. They divided life, I had quickly discovered, into components, pleasant and unpleasant. The pleasant ones they courted; the others they cut dead. "You do not exist," they seemed to say; and for them, indeed, nothing did exist but what their hearts desired. It was certainly an admirable philosophy, though to freer spirits, like Vignolles and myself, it made conversation or any general survey of the world at times rather difficult, and, in moments of impatience we were both of us inclined to regard the older Carey-Holts as a couple of bores.

"It 's that generation—our generation," Vignolles had once exclaimed, "that made the war! I belong to it, and yet I hate it; no wonder I could n't get on with it! By Jove, we were rotten and we 're still rotten! If the young 'uns don't kick us out, or hold us down and muzzle us, we 'll start some devilment again. We 've neither heart, nor imagination, nor pluck, nor common honesty. I see it on half the committees

I 'm working with and whose motto is compromise and delay, till somebody gets up and reminds them that hunger and cold are real and that men and women are n't just figures in a blue-book or a bundle of statistics. That 's why I love those kids I 've got hold of. They have n't learnt to funk things—not yet, at least—and, by George, they never shall if I can help it!"

He had his own ideas about their education. It was difficult, he admitted. "I don't want them to belong to one class. I want them to be English, first and foremost. The class does n't much matter as long as they care for the country and the land out of which they grew." He enlarged on this topic: "I don't believe that, ultimately, there 's anything worth learning but history, for if you know the past you 're at home in the present, and you 've some chance of guessing right when you look ahead. The gentlemen who govern us seem constantly to be taken by surprise. Carey-Holt would do well at that job."

But I digress; indeed, I digress most shamefully; for it is not these two generations—that of the children and my own—with which just now I am most pressingly concerned. There was

an older generation still, the third on our list; that of the two in-laws, the Honorable John and the Honorable Amelia, from whose Richmond place of residence Mrs. Tyrrell and the children had been so unexpectedly transplanted.

Me, for some curious reason, these two had accepted with very effortless and genuine cordiality. I have occasionally wondered about it, and have concluded that this condescension may be explained by the fact that my mother's cousin, Mary Branston, had married the Earl of Tadcaster. That must be it, for on more than one occasion they alluded to this relationship; and, indeed, it seemed to "place" me and tell them exactly who I was—in their eyes, at least. Vignolles, poor chap, could provide them with nothing so solid. I saw that that worried them and made a complete mess of his other qualities. To me they were very gracious; with Vignolles they maintained an unmistakable reserve.

I called on these old people several times. I had met them frequently at the new house, and it was only decent; and—may I be forgiven for saying it!—with all their pride and their condescension and their reservations, they were about the most futile pair of personages I have

ever known. Nor were they particularly backward about letting me into the peculiar and fatuous phases of a history which to them no doubt was completely normal and acceptable. For seventy years and over they had lived upon this planet, and it seemed to me that in all that time neither the one nor the other had done a fair day's work; nor had it ever occurred to either one of them that anything so absurd could be demanded. They had not, of course, claimed this immunity; they had merely taken it for granted.

I have often wondered what would have become of this old couple had not Vignolles appeared at exactly the right moment; for the war, playing upon their inelastic revenues, had left them very badly in the lurch. And, moreover, the Honorable John, grasping at a chance remark dropped by Mr. Carey-Holt, had tried his luck upon the Stock Exchange and discovered that neither Mr. Carey-Holt nor his chance remarks were to be taken as infallible. Vignolles had helped them out of this affair, and at the same time had suggested to his brother-in-law that the old gentleman had better be discouraged in future; and, indeed, he had gone deep enough

into the disordered finances of the two elder Tyrrells as to place these on a footing of some security. To them it appeared that he had sold out and re-invested, very profitably and very wisely; to me it appeared that he had exchanged their depreciated bonds for some of his own more lucrative securities.

I have a very clear recollection of a visit I paid to them about this period and of the tea they offered me in their little drawing-room. It was very good tea, and, in fact, so excellent that I remarked upon its quality and flavor.

They appreciated the compliment, and the Honorable John observed that one could trust Mrs. Tyrrell to get the "best of everything"; and next that dear old lady herself looked out on me, and with a certain child-like candor that was very winning, remarked quite simply: "To think that our boy's widow and our grandchildren should be dependent on this Mr. Vignolles!"

It was an embarrassing turn and I had no immediate reply; nor could I feel any anger with one so old and so very helpless.

"If one only knew anything about him," she ran on, "that would make all the difference. Of course we 've met his sister and the brother-

in-law who cheated John. Now, that was n't very creditable."

"Well, it turned out all right, as it happened," the old gentleman interrupted her.

"Not through any fault of his," she rapped out, quite sharply. "And of course Mr. Vignolles has been kind and taken a lot of trouble; but all these new people—it is difficult to get used to them." And then the thought that had all along possessed her came suddenly to the surface, as she added, "If he 'd been a gentleman, he 'd have proposed to Angela instead of making this other arrangement."

"That would have been impossible," exclaimed the Honorable John, bridling.

Berta, the girl who was somebody's secretary, shared with me the honor of this interview. She resided with her grandparents, but otherwise was very independent, and, I believe, paid her way. She smiled across at me now, as much as to say, "They do talk, don't they?"

I attempted my little diversions and tried to interest them in some other subject, half a dozen other subjects, more or less; but Vignolles, and his social obscurity, and his not belonging to a recognizable class or circle—these were the

points that mattered on this particular afternoon, and they returned to them again and yet again. They rankled, evidently.

"Now, if he were an American. One does n't mind it so much with them, does one? And I suppose they are somebody in their own country." It was the Honorable Amelia who had crossed the Atlantic and arrived at this decision on the other side.

"In any case," I said at last, "if people work, they can't very well pick and choose whom they 'll work for."

"No, I suppose not," admitted the Honorable John. "But there must be a few of us left; and perhaps Angela need n't have been so hasty."

It was no use arguing with them. I realized that, and how they had been brought up to regard people of a certain class as one thing and people of all other classes as another. Nor had Vignolles ever done anything considerable in politics or in law, or in any of those recognizable channels by which the commoner sort may enter upon a higher meeting-ground. He was most deplorably defenseless; and even the Carey-Holts, I next imagined, must in their heart of hearts regard him as some one who only by

accident had escaped the category of the disreputable.

"He 's very modest, certainly," the old lady had conceded, "and most people of that sort are rather loud."

"As long as he treats Angela with respect," the Honorable John had answered, "we must allow her to accept the situation."

"And the children?" I ventured, I dare say a trifle maliciously. "They seem to find him perfect."

"Oh, children are children," remarked the Honorable Amelia; and then she laughed and explained it by adding: "When I was a little girl, I 'm afraid my best friends were the servants. I was always in the stables, or playing about in the housekeeper's rooms"; and the Honorable John laughed, too.

"I know we had a groom called Richards," said he, "and when I was a boy, he and I used to slink off and go racing. Not that for a moment I wish to compare Mr. Vignolles with poor old Richards," he corrected himself.

And then again I caught the eye of their grandchild, the independent Berta. She rose with me when I left and insisted on seeing me to

the door and told the old gentleman that he must n't trouble. And when we two were alone in the little hall, "I could throw things at them," she cried, passionately; "only I know they can't help it! And Mother 's nearly as bad; but she 's not too old to grow out of it. I don't know what you must think of us! I often think that it 's a good job all we Tyrrells and people like us are pretty well done for. I would n't marry one of them—" She had stopped short, rather flushed and as though surprised at herself; and she looked at me through her mother's eyes and with much the same softness creeping into her face and making it more charming than I could ever have suspected.

"He 'll be a lucky chap, whoever he is," I said, taking her hand and tapping her lightly on the shoulder—I was old enough to allow myself that liberty. "A deuced lucky chap, Berta! I mean it—of course I mean it. And there 's no harm done by what your grandfather and grandmother have said about old Fred. He can stand it. He 's stood a good deal in his time, I should say; and a little more or less—"

"Can't hurt?" She had finished it for me.

And after that we shook hands, and I raised

"I don't know what you must think of us"

my hat to her and found the way downhill to Richmond Station.

IX

It was all very curious; it was even a little disgusting and calculated to shake one's faith in what is called "human nature"; for there was not one of these people, who, in some way or another, did not stand in Vignolles's debt, and not one of them had a good word to say for him. I except, of course, those three delightful children, who, so far, were unspoiled and had not reached the age of criticism—no, not even the full-grown Berta! I had been pleased and astonished at her outbreak on that afternoon, as she was usually quiet and not especially demonstrative. She took most things in, I had discovered, but did not give very much away; and probably that was why she had made a success of her work as somebody's secretary.

I could understand the Carey-Holts. Young and old, they were greedy, and, being of the same blood with him, quite inevitably they must look upon Vignolles as their natural prey. I could even understand the older Tyrrells, whose pride

and whose prejudices were these years very much on edge and to whom my friend must appear as a final portent of disorder. To them he must have come as the proverbial last straw; for even a Jew money-lender will do no more than produce his bond and ready cash and you are spared the horrors of his table. This the Honorable John had understood and could still understand. Not that poor old Fred bore any remote resemblance to such fowl, but most certainly he had put the older Tyrrells under obligations. And somebody *had* to put them under obligations, one felt sure, and, whoever it was, they would have hated it. But that young Mrs. Tyrrell should question Fred—she who was under no very special obligation—I did feel that that was rather strong; but, perhaps, as Berta had argued, she might get over it.

Yet not at all, for there came a day when she turned to me and I had to hear her rendering, or shall we describe it as her protest? It was during one of my week-ends with them and very much under the same circumstances as those that had occurred before. Fred had taken the children out for a long scramble through the fields, and Mrs. Tyrrell and I had remained

behind. The gardens were indeed lovely at this season, when all the flowering shrubs blossomed in procession, seizing on that month before June passes quite away and carries off the year's first bounteous wonders.

Angela Tyrrell and I had stayed behind, and, to tell the cold philandering truth, it always did me good to look at her and pass an hour or two in her society. She was so absurdly pretty now that she was free from care, and young—indeed, I often thought that with each month she seemed to grow a year younger.

I told her so that morning, and added, "If you go on like that we 'll have to send you to school again like Kit and Eden, or perhaps we 'll find you a place as somebody's secretary."

"Oh, it 's these fashions!" she laughed. "The way we dress to-day—it makes us all look our best—and sometimes our worst."

And yet she was not so noticeably displayed as were most of her tantalizing species at that particular epoch of jumpers and short skirts.

"Fashions?" I had answered. "No, it 's not that. You 're happy; you 're absolutely happy. I don't believe you 've a care in the world, of any consequence."

She knit her brow at this, and looked at me very steadily.

"How little you know!" she said; "though I suppose I 'm foolish. Most women in my position would give a great deal to exchange with me. I 'm aware of that. But I 've had a home of my own, have n't I?"

On this enigmatic question there followed a silence. It was delicate ground and I had no wish to intrude upon it.

"But it does hurt a little, being in another person's house," she next resumed; "not that Mr. Vignolles is n't always considerate—too considerate. He does n't know much about women, though, does he?"

At that I was forced to smile; for a keener judge of a difficult sex in all its breeds and races, white, yellow, and brown, I had rarely met.

"Well, our class," she corrected herself; "perhaps he does know 'women'; but there 's a difference, is n't there?"

"I suppose there is; I 've often wondered. You see, I 've never been married to anybody, and it 's only then one knows for certain." And next I took the bull by the horns; it was about time that somebody spoke up for him: "All you

people—I know what I 'm talking about—rather look down on dear old Fred, don't you?"

She hesitated, somewhat taken by surprise, for this was hardly the kind of diversion she had expected. But I did n't stop for her, and running on: "Your father-in-law and mother-in-law are pretty frank about it, and the Carey-Holts give themselves away whenever they get going, and you, when you 're caught unawares; there 's only me and the children. And, by Jove, if he is n't the best of the whole lot of us!"

She waited a little longer before she found a reply, and then she came out with it pat and very briefly. "He 's different from anything I 've been used to," she answered; and there, seemingly, was the end to it.

But I was n't done. Far from it!

"You think—you think that he 's not what you call—I 'll use the hateful word—a gentleman? That he 's not what people like you and your parents call a gentleman?"

She reflected for a moment, and then, "I suppose it *is* that," she conceded.

"But the children don't find him so, and they 're better judges than you and I; and the future belongs to them, in any case. Has it

ever occurred to you," I asked more quietly, "that we of our generation will be edged out—are practically done for?"

"Are we?" she said. "I don't feel particularly 'done for'"; and it was difficult to resist her charming smile and the humor that lurked about her voice and soft blue eyes as she said it.

But I was serious.

"You 've bumped into a man—a big man," I said, "who has had the courage not to be what you call a 'gentleman.'"

She did n't quite follow me, and I could see the effort; so, "What I mean is exactly this," I continued. "Fred 's taken his own line and has n't followed other people's. And when all of you say he 's not quite right, that 's what you mean; for it 's nothing else. You 're never quite sure what he 's going to do or say; that 's it, now is n't it? And all you people 'd like to tyrannize and make him the same as everybody else and say and do what *you* like. If he 'd been that kind, and soft and common—well, there would have been no garden and no house for us here; and you—you can guess what I might say but I won't say."

"The children and I would still be at Rich-

mond?" She faced that courageously. And next, "Go on—do go on," she said; "I rather like it."

I went on:

"After all, there must be a few people who don't cringe and lie, and who say straight out what they think, and who are n't afraid of loving and who are n't afraid of hating; and who don't care whether they 're rich or poor, and don't expect to be kept in the one case and are n't fat parasites in the other. After all, Fred 's giving the world some value for its money. Dashed good value, I should say!"

My eyes were resting straight on her; and there they stayed, taking in the full-blown beauty of her. For these last moments she seemed to have expanded and warmed and completed herself, as though she were a flower; as though she had opened and filled like a rose kissed wide by the sun. And then she moved toward me, one step closer, and in her low, sweet voice, "I see—I see," she said. "It had never occurred to me. A woman looks in, perhaps, too much, instead of looking out. And I 'm forgetting all about the Sunday dinner, am I not?" she ended. "You 'll amuse yourself for a little while?"

She was gone, leaving me alone on the big lawn by the greenhouses; and I was feeling rather the better for having said my say; and if I took the path through the wood, I 'd be sure to run into Fred Vignolles and the children, and if I did n't it would n't much matter.

But I did and walked a mile with them, and they made him blow smoke-rings on the way and leap the ditch instead of crossing by the plank; and at table—we were just the five of us—there was the usual scramble as to who should sit next to Uncle Fred. It was Kit's turn, it seemed, but, being a lady and therefore less law-abiding, Eden had jumped his claim and was installed. . . . Yes, it was quite clear. Those children owned him now; he was their property; and they called him Uncle Fred, because, if he called them Kit and Eden and took other liberties, surely they had the right to call him Fred. And the "Uncle" was, firstly, a concession to his years and maturity; secondly, to his rank in our vanished armies, still cherished by these children; and thirdly, to euphony and to convenience. They had argued it out between the three of them, and, after a hot debate, had arrived at this decision.

X

I do not know that Vignolles would have been especially interested in all these discussions, or that he would have cared very much whether these people approved of him or whether they did n't; and so secure seemed his serenity that it more than once occurred to me how no one would have been more astonished than just he, had he discovered that his doings and his shortcomings were being dissected with so great a heat and from so many different points of view and angles. He gave no sign of any inklings or least suspicion of the truth; he was invariably the same, and, just now, deeply committed and engaged with his many tasks and duties. He did get impatient once or twice, expressing himself with his usual vigor; but that was quite outside anything connected with his private affairs or his domestic circumstances.

The newspapers had discovered him, it seemed, and had agreed that he was what they called "a personality." He was keen on the disabled soldier, the workless, and every other kind of soldier, and he had said some characteristically

downright things about the government departments concerned, about some of the trades unions, and also about certain of our big employers. He had said them in committee and at semi-private meetings; yet, somehow, they had got into those confounded newspapers! And he did n't mind *that* so much, but what he did mind was that, instead of dwelling on the matters he had at heart and which were of real consequence, the most of these wretched journals had merely exploited *him;* had seized with a strange tenacity on Fred Vignolles, and let the rest go hang. He did n't at all like it.

"But you can't help that," I explained one day, as we were strolling arm in arm down St. James's Street after one of these very committee-meetings; for I was in it too a little, though hardly very much in the limelight, where circumstance, leisure, and a very clear sense of duty had placed my friend.

"You 've been out of England too long; and just now, I 'm afraid, England 's all politics and newspapers," I had pursued. "Especially newspapers. Modern civilization 's mostly getting things into them or keeping things out—keeping 'em out, I fancy—and we 've got to swallow it."

"But why all this nonsense about *me?*" he answered. "I don't want anything."

"That alone must make you something of a novelty; and they're after new things, aren't they? That's why they are called newspapers."

I was enjoying my own little joke, when suddenly he too started to chuckle. But not at me, nor at anything I had left said or unsaid. For presently he came out with it:

"You know those two old Tyrrells," he began, "the Honorable John and the Honorable Amelia, who fancy themselves so enormously and think that they're the products of a separate act of creation—well, they're enormously impressed by it, and so's my sister and Carey-Holt, and they can't hide it."

We had reached the club where we were lunching, and, seated at our corner table, he reverted to this topic.

"You see, people like me, when we get into those confounded newspapers, begin to count. Rather ridiculous, ain't it?"

"It's a ridiculous world," I assured him. "Why, even this place"—and I looked round at its pillars and its marbles and its waiters and waitresses with brass buttons and a kind of

uniform—"even this place—if you belong to it, you 're supposed to be a Conservative. Are you one?"

"Blest if I know!" said Vignolles. "It was handy, and there was a fellow who offered to put me up. They give you a very good lunch, and it 's fairly reasonable—cheaper than those damned restaurants, where they stick you and look quite hurt if you don't go strong on the wine list." And next he wandered back to the older Tyrrells; for it appeared that the Honorable John had been having another little flutter and had been caught short—it was some kind of oils—and had n't the ready cash to meet the difference.

"If the old fellow will gamble," I said curtly, "he must stand the racket."

"Must he?" smiled Vignolles. "I think I 'll let the old lady and Berta give him a good wigging, and then, perhaps, I 'll sail in and lend him the hundred or two he 's asked for. Poor old chap, he 's been brought up to regard backing horses, cards, and the Stock Exchange as Britain's leading industries!"

He dwelt for a moment longer with the Honor-

able John, and likewise with the Honorable Amelia.

"That old couple," he pursued, "I know they think me mud, as the dirt under their feet; they 've said as much to you, have n't they?"

"They did n't put it quite so picturesquely; but it was something of the kind."

"And the Carey-Holts," he ran on, "my sister and all that lot, can't get over my having a bit of money. I suppose they 're a trifle disappointed? Blurted it out to you, I 'll bet. You 've a knack of worming out these confidences." And he laughed aloud at me. "Are n't I an instance?" he asked. "I 'm telling you all I know and a little you did n't want me to know. They 're all divided among themselves and all united in thinking me the limit."

I let him go on; for I could n't deny it; though I had never suspected him of seeing so far into them and showing neither displeasure nor disgust at what I, certainly, should have resented.

"And young Mrs. Tyrrell," he added now, "she 's a trifle critical? But Kit and Eden and I don't care for anybody, and I bet Berta 's on

our side. It 's all very natural, though, is n't it?"

It did n't seem so very natural to me, and I began to say as much. But he interrupted me.

"Those poor old Tyrrells!" he exclaimed. "Don't you see that they 've never had a chance? That they 've been most shamefully neglected; just like the poor devils you meet down in Lambeth or any other slum, only they 're at the top end instead of at the bottom? Never learnt anything at school, never been anywhere, never done anything, never been kicked into doing anything! Oh, they 're all right. If they 'd only had a fair chance, they might have been something rather splendid. Too late, now, is n't it? No good producing people of that kind unless you give them money and lots of responsibility; and they 've never had either. They 've been cheated; and so they 've had to dig themselves in behind their prejudices, just like the anarchists and communists and socialists and all those other fellows one hears so much about and who are at the other end of it. If old John had come of a less exalted stock, perhaps he 'd have been one of that lot, and out to skin people openly; on paper, or with his mouth, or somehow safe.

Though I believe the old chap would have had the pluck and breeding to come out fair and square instead of skulking."

We had reached the club smoking-room by now and, apparently he was enjoying these dissertations; for, seated in comfort, he came next to the Carey-Holts, his sister and his brother-in-law; and he had no illusions about them, either.

"They 're my own tribe, I suppose, and the tribe I 've escaped," was how he read them. "Perhaps I 'd have finished up like that myself if I 'd been a good little boy and honored my parents. Now I 've got some money, they feel they 've a right to it. But don't they feel that they 've a right to all the money in the world—if they can get hold of it? That 's their view of life, or their religion. It 's the sort of thing you rather come to in London, in Paris, in New York—in all the big cities. You 've got to get money there, or go under. And so you begin to make a god of money; and, gradually, it displaces the old gods whom one would like to see kept alive. 'Old-fashioned,' Carey-Holt would say. But you can't quite help it when you 've known great skies of stars, and watched the sun come up or drop below the ranges, or

when you 've played your life against the wonder of the sea. Or, perhaps, you 've kicked up a few coins in the drifting sands of the desert and found the carving on a broken column; and you know that a thousand cities have risen and disappeared and their Carey-Holts with them. But the stars have n't changed, and the sun has n't changed, and the hearts of kids like Kit and Eden. Poor old Carey-Holt!—he can't help it."

And next there was Angela Tyrrell; and I wondered whether, with his curious insight, that nothing escaped, that revealed everything, he had found a clue to her.

He had, seemingly; for now he produced a letter from an inside pocket; and, "Look at this," he said, handing it over.

I unfolded the thing. It was written on the one page and dated from the house on the country's edge, and at the foot I read, "Angela Tyrrell." And next I attacked the note itself, which ran:

DEAR MR. VIGNOLLES:

There are certain personal and private reasons why our present arrangement must come to an end. I need not enter into them, for it is sufficient to state that they exist. Of course I am

not going to leave you in the lurch, but as soon as you have found a successor, I should be glad to hear of it, so that I can make my plans accordingly. You may rest assured that I will never forget your kindness and consideration, and that the children, could they express themselves, would be in full agreement with

Yours most sincerely,
ANGELA TYRRELL.

I whistled when I had read this. I folded it and returned it.

"Rather a blow, is n't it?" I asked; and then, on a moment's reflection, "So charming a woman —of course, one might expect it."

"I did expect it," he answered, unconcerned.

"Marrying again?" I said.

"Sure," he replied; and next, dismissing the matter: "She 's had a little difficulty in swallowing me, as well? You seem to be in everybody's confidence," and he smiled with his curious eyes, the youth and the expressive vitality of which were always to me so striking.

He did not wait for my answer; indeed, any answer to that would have been rather beyond me. She *had* had a little difficulty in swallowing him; but who was I to report as to whether she had or as to whether she had n't?

Vignolles interrupted these reflections with a question, or was it a reminiscence? I confess that the point of it escaped me at the time.

"You remember," he asked suddenly, "the little dun mare I used to ride, the one I had at Kantara?"

I remembered it perfectly.

"The other fellows had given it up. It would n't pass this and it would n't pass that and it shied at its own shadow; it had nerves and it was afraid—so everybody told me. Well, when I 'd had it a month or two, I could make it pass anything. I don't think I did more than talk to it and stroke its nose. Angela Tyrrell 's a trifle like that little mare," he ended, thoughtfully; "more than a trifle."

XI

It was altogether inexplicable, and, in a way, painful. Vignolles would lose those two delightful kids that he was so set upon, and they would lose Vignolles; and I doubted whether this new man—I was already picturing him, and rather jealously—would prove anything but a poor substitute for my big-hearted friend; as to whose

unconcern—he had acted it very cleverly—was it not merely a cloak under which he hid the hurt he had sustained? A deep wound, I felt it must be, for all his acting and all his cleverness; and my imagination raced, and I saw the house—that warm nest he had made for them—standing cheerless, standing emptied, and him doing his best to get over it. And I saw, too, the Carey-Holts, all four of them, rubbing their hands together and plucking up courage; and the two old Tyrrells hovering round and questioning and getting the right answer—the man was one of the well-groomed, one of the self-satisfied, one of their own dull sort. And then I saw Kit and Eden having to part with their Uncle Fred, and setting up no end of a howl at the cruel prospect. I think I must have spent a very miserable evening. And next day there was Berta, whom I had invited to dinner and a theater; for I felt that, apart from her always invigorating company, it was up to me to give her some change in the round of being somebody's secretary.

"What do *you* think of it?" I had asked her, as she helped herself to a cigarette and dropped a pill of that wretched saccharine into her cof-

fee; "of your mother 's leaving us, and all that? But, of course, I 'm a trifle jealous—bound to be!"

Berta looked at me and looked at me; so I went into the crude details.

"Mother 's chucked her job?" she exclaimed. "It 's the first I 've heard of it."

"Of course—so charming a woman—it 's very natural."

"Natural fiddlesticks!" Berta had interrupted. "What *are* you talking about?" She was a very direct young person, like all these samples of the new generation that now are tramping on our slower-moving heels.

"Well, I 'll come out with it," said I.

"Do," said Berta.

"I suppose your mother 's going to marry again—and so does Fred."

Berta laughed. She rolled in her chair like a silly schoolboy and roared at us; for I include old Fred, whom I had merely quoted.

"You suppose that, do you?" she asked, shaking some of the hair that she wore short and rather in a mop, out of her eyes, and looking across at me with an expression which plainly

conveyed that she thought me something not very far removed from an infant.

"I 'll run down and see Mother," she said next; and then, smiling out at me, very frankly and with that big-brotherly air she so often produced: "Mother 's gone potty on old Fred," she added, "and the joke is that she does n't know it!"

It was irreverent—it was most deucedly irreverent—but, with this younger and this newer generation, one was growing used to that.

"What evidence?" I asked, aiming at severity, and making, I believe, rather a hash of it. "What evidence have you?" I repeated.

"Oh, one just knows. Either one does or else one does n't."

"I suppose even you make mistakes, sometimes," I replied to this; "though you *will* be nineteen next birthday and you pay for your own frocks."

She disregarded this superiority, and, rising from her chair, "All right; I thought I 'd tell you; and what about that old play?" she ended.

We reached it just in time to see the curtain rise and some guests being announced in a bright

green drawing-room. And then they talked and talked and talked away instead of getting on with the business. Berta seemed to enjoy it all, though I confess I did n't.

XII

The mystery was none the clearer when, on the next day, I received a brief yet jubilant message from Fred Vignolles, in which he announced that Angela and he were getting married. "And you 're to be best man and a witness and all that," he said. "It 'll be very quiet; we 're fixing it up with the parson here and it 's not getting into those confounded newspapers. Angela 's got some shopping to do and I 've got a committee. We 'll look you up in a day or two and tell you all about it."

Of course I was impatient, but really I had n't so very long to wait before they sent a wire, and, in the afternoon, came up themselves—Fred rather hurried and late for some engagement in the City.

"You 'll give Angela tea and let her rest a little," he said, after I had done with my congratulations and he had explained that he had

"I 'll be back as soon as they let me," he ended, "and you 'll take care of her"

to be off again at once. "I 'll be back as soon as they let me," he ended, "and you 'll take care of her. I can find my way out; don't trouble"; and he was gone. And there was Angela, lovely, quite radiant, and following him to the doorway with her eyes.

I rang for tea and my man served it; and when he was done, "What 's all this?" I asked. "I 'm dying—I 'm simply dying to hear."

She smiled her soft, mysterious smile, so full of secret happiness; but even that did n't take me very much farther.

"When you 've done smiling," I said, "and looking beautiful—yes, you do look beautiful."

She liked that, too, and glowed to it.

"You 're unendurably pretty—"

"Am I?" And then, "I feel it," she said quite simply; and turning to me lazily and with her usual frankness, "You dear man," she added, "it 's very much your fault."

I shook my head at this, for it was n't very clear.

"Why mine?" I asked.

"When I was a little fool—that seems ages ago now—when I behaved and talked like a little fool, did n't you always stick up for Fred?"

"Oh, that!" I answered. "Anybody would have done that!"

"Nobody else did—nobody grown up—and you made me see him at last, as he is, and not as I wanted him to be. He 's bigger—ever so much bigger—than the man I wanted him to be. He 's bigger than any of us; and yet we all had the impertinence to sneer and to criticize. I don't think I 'd have discovered that if you had n't scolded so. You *did* scold; and I deserved it; of course, if I had n't deserved it, you would n't have scolded."

She had paused here; and now I nodded, for I was beginning to understand—a little with Berta's help, too, as I remembered how Berta had sized her mother up as being undecided, on the fence, so to speak: she might come down on our side, the right side, or she might choose for the other, for the tradition of the older Tyrrells. She had, however, come over to us—come to us now quite definitely. She was young enough for that; she had a sufficient force and vitality.

"I 'm glad," I almost shouted, as I realized what I have endeavored to express; lamely, I fancy, but it must do.

Yet all this did n't take us very much farther;

and next I found myself asking, "Why did you write that letter—that letter giving Fred notice, throwing up your job?"

"I don't know; I could n't help it. As long as I did n't think much about him—rather despised him—for I did despise him—I never questioned. I could have stayed on forever like that," she now explained. "But when I left off being a little snob and a little cad and saw him as he was and saw what a little beast I was—then I had to go. I could n't stay; I simply had to go."

She was done; and though I offered no comment, I thought the more.

"And Fred?" I asked at last.

"Oh, he looked up at me—I had come in to his study and he was sitting at the writing-desk. I had come in to see him about the housekeeping—about the checks and things. He was busy when I came in, and he 'd had my letter giving notice, and he had n't said anything, and it had n't made a bit of difference. My letter was on the desk. He held it up to me, and 'I ought to have answered this, I suppose,' he said, quite cold and businesslike."

She was enjoying it all, and she paused before she went on again:

"I did n't quite know what to say, for I had grown a little afraid of him; and he was looking up at me; and then his eyes softened, and next he just took me—simply took me—just as if I 'd been Kit or Eden, just as if I 'd been a child. And then I first knew what love was; I 'd never known till then. I 'm telling you this —I don't know why I 'm telling you this—but one has to tell somebody. And I don't know that I could talk about it to Fred—not now, when one is living it. Oh, if you talk about things you feel and do together, it 's not right, is it? Because there are n't words, really. Of course it 's foolish of me to go on like this—an old woman with three big children!—is n't it? But till now, I did n't know. I was just a girl before; and Arthur loved me and I let him love me—that was all. Perhaps it 's cruel and wrong of me to say it. But when one 's a girl, one does n't know, does one?"

It seemed to me, as I listened to her then—as I had never listened to her before and as I have never listened to her since—that it did her good to say these things. So much of what she had said was new to her—so very much! And there was I—old and spent and gray, and rather like

a father confessor, or some fat priest. I made the comparison aloud. At any rate, it might change her mood or bring a laugh.

It did both.

"Yes, you would have made a very good priest," she answered, smiling and her old untroubled self again. "You ought to have been a Catholic, and then they 'd have made you a bishop."

"If you say so," I replied; "still, I 'm of some use as I am."

I remember that I was rather glad when Fred came back and took her away from me; for, after all, it hurt a little—it hurt a good deal more than a little.

"You 're spending the week-end with us," they said before they left. "It 'll be the last—till we come back."

They went after that, and I saw them downstairs to the car that was waiting in the dusk of a November evening; and going back to my rooms, I stirred the fire and looked out of the window at the naked trees. It was solitary up here—lonely—dashed lonely!

XIII

I remember that next week-end with a peculiar fullness; for everything and everybody seemed changed, down to the very servants, who had all grown sentimental and were wallowing—positively wallowing—in this sudden outbreak of romance. It moved them, this story with its "happy ending" all complete; and I could understand them and forgive them; for was it not one of their most cherished legends come to life? had not our most popular writers built their fortunes on this identical complication? Those servant-girls loved it; and they were not far wrong.

And the two older Tyrrells, the Honorable John and the Honorable Amelia, who had been here as watch-dogs ever since they had heard the news? They had safeguarded the proprieties; to-day they were full of an importance; they were Mr. and Mrs. Grundy. The world had found a use for them at last. And they had put by their objections; stood neither aloof nor coldly critical. Rather the reverse.

"She 's making a good match—a rare good match," the Honorable John confided to me; "and you know, after all, he is n't a bad fellow.

A very good fellow, when you really know him."

The Honorable Amelia agreed with this estimate, apparently; for she nodded wisely, and, "It 's such an excellent thing for the children," she added to her husband's summary. "Mr. Vignolles is not very young; but Angela 's not far from forty. Yes, I think it 's a very good match, considering."

Besides the two old Tyrrells, on the Sunday we had a visit from the head of their house, the earl and his countess, hitherto invisible and mysterious figures who had somehow only been held over our unworthy heads. They had materialized at last, quite a youngish couple, who had driven up from somewhere, left their cards, and stayed to tea. The Honorable John was full of it; took, indeed, some little time to get over it; though his nephew or his great-nephew—I forget the exact relationship—appeared to be a very modest fellow, and, if anything, somewhat afraid of us. Nor he nor his lady seemed to have any great illusions about their superiority to common-folk. They had the title, and it was a luxury that cost no end to keep up and involved all manner of duties, and one could n't in any way get out of it. Such

might have been their view of the thing. They implied as much, strolling through the grounds and admiring the completeness of the little place. I think they envied Fred his simpler state.

Nor must I omit the Carey-Holts, who had motored down with *their* congratulations; and I will say this much for them, now the decision had been declared, they took their defeat like sportsmen. "You 've won," Mrs. Carey-Holt might have said to Angela; "and there 's an end to it." But of course she never said anything of the kind; yet, for all that, she and the stockbroker and the two young people were uncommonly decent, the girl sizing up the situation as it affected the whole of them, when, getting me apart, "It is n't as though Uncle Fred were marrying a nobody," she said; "and, of course, he has a perfect right to do as he pleases."

Through all these people and through all this coming and going, I have still a vision of Kit and Eden, both hugely excited and full of the infection that was in the air; passing from group to group, being called to and petted, and every now and again wondering and bewildered by

these grown-ups and the fuss that they were making.

And, lastly, there was Fred, looking out on us all, unchanged, and rather impassive, as though, something like the children, he too were wondering why all these people should press round in a matter that, primarily, concerned but Angela Tyrrell and himself.

After supper the house quieted down a little, and presently Angela and the old people went their way and only Fred and I were left of that whole host. Before turning in for the night we went up to his den. It was peaceful there and comfortable, and one had no fear of being disturbed.

We smoked our cigars and sat in two big chairs with the firelight playing between us; and my thoughts went back to the day when, returned from his wanderings, he had told me how the war had unexpectedly given him a fortune, and of his desire "to do some good with it." And next I dwelt on that quaint advertisement he had put into the newspapers, and his war-widows and their children, and how he had lit on Angela Tyrrell. A year had passed since

then, a year and over; and Angela Tyrrell had been living here a good many months.

I recalled the whole affair to him, went over its outstanding phases. "To think that it should end like this!" I said.

"It might have ended worse, might n't it?" he asked, smiling that curious, semi-detached and wholly philosophic smile of his that was so baffling to the common egoist.

I nodded. And then, "You took your time over it," I pursued; "you spotted the children pretty quick, but it took you rather a long time to discover a very charming woman, did n't it?"

"Five minutes," he answered; "five minutes."

"You old rascal!" I gasped, sitting bolt upright in my chair. "You old rascal! Do you mean to say that all along you 've been deceiving us—that it was n't the children?"

"Well, of course," and next he added, "I wanted the children; but they grow up and go away from you—and then?"

"Do you mean to say that you plotted the whole thing out, and that all the time—"

"I mean to say that I met exactly the right woman and gave myself the chance of winning her."

"By Gad, you are a wonder!—you always were a wonder!" was the only answer I could find to this.

"Not always—by Jove not!" he corrected me. "But I have met a woman before to-day, if that 's what you mean."

"I never doubted it; but to take us all in!" I seemed, at the moment, unable to get over that part of the business.

He explained matters further; and perhaps he owed me this last confidence; or, like Angela Tyrrell, he felt a human need to "tell somebody."

"I might have been deceiving myself, as well as you," he had pursued; "and, in any case, Kit and Eden were all right; but when I got that letter giving me notice—I showed it to you—then I knew."

"Knew what?"

"That if I asked Angela to stay here, she would stay."

"You mean it told you—it told you she was fond of you?"

"If you like to put it that way."

Angela herself had already put it very much stronger; but I could n't well tell him so, could I?

"But how did you *know?*" I asked. "How did you *know?*"

"You dear old idiot, wasn't I waiting for it! Didn't I know that if she cared, she couldn't very well stay on—as a housekeeper?"

He was right; and again Angela herself was my authority.

"So you waited for that, did you?"

"Look here, me lad, it had to happen in one of three ways, had n't it?"

He expected me to follow this; but I did n't.

"I see. I had better explain," he now continued. "I might have proposed then and there, after five minutes, might n't I? But that would have been ridiculous, so we'll count it out. That leaves two."

I followed so far.

"Or, secondly, I could have waited for a few months, and then I could have proposed romantically, as we used to do when we were young and foolish. Angela might have accepted me or she might not. She probably would n't have; but assuming she had, she'd have argued this way about it: 'Poor old thing, I'd better take pity on him.' And 'poor old thing,' I'd have been to her for the rest of my days. So many

wives are like that, and so many husbands. You may have noticed it?"

I had noticed *that.*

"They marry some poor devil to put him out of his pain and they 're sorry for him ever afterward. I can't say that I wanted to be pitied. Never have done, never will do. But there was one other way. I was sure enough of myself—"

"You mean to say you left it to her to do the rest; and that 's what that letter of hers comes to?"

"It 's no good marrying a woman unless she cares for you," he parried, "is it? And I 've wanted that; wanted that most damnably for Lord knows how many years!"

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